

Lawyer says Ocalan left Europe

BONN (R) — Abdullah Ocalan, chief of the outlawed Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) and Turkey's most wanted man, is in hiding outside Europe, a German newspaper on Friday quoted his lawyer as saying. Britta Boehler, one of a team of lawyers representing the Kurdish guerrilla leader, told the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* daily the Netherlands recently refused Ocalan entry but denied reports his plane had tried to land there. A Turkish official said earlier this week Ocalan's plane was held up at a remote Russian military airport before he made his way to Rotterdam airport, where he was turned back. Another Turkish official said Ocalan had then flown to Greece and "in all likelihood returned from whence he came," implying he went back to Russia. Boehler denied this.

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Jordanians pray for King Hussein

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordanians prayed last night for His Majesty King Hussein, who returned home Friday in crit-

ical condition after cancer treatment in the United States. The King is sustained by a life support system, a senior official said Friday.

"The King wanted to [be] among his people," the offi-

cial told the Jordan Times. "He is in a coma and is being sustained by life support machines." The official said the Cabinet is on stand-by for any developments.

The King was received at

Queen Alia International Airport by HRH Crown Prince Abdullah, HRH Prince Mohammad and HRH Prince Hassan and other family members. Prime Minister Fayed

Tarawneh, Parliament leaders, and other senior officials were also present at the airport.

Shocked Jordanians, who have known no other leader for the last 47 years, have been glued to their television screens and radios waiting to hear news of the King's health. Mosque preachers and worshippers prayed for his recovery.

While foreign news agencies and television stations claimed the King was "clinically dead," Prime Minister Fayed Tarawneh told Jordan Television the King's condition was "critical" and cautioned foreign news agencies and televisions against "speculation."

"They [news agencies and satellite stations] have despatched many reports full of speculation. I hope the media will quote only the official announcements from the Royal Court or the government," the premier said during the evening news broadcast. "King Hussein is receiving intensive care and he is under constant observation. We must realise that many of the reports are sensational and aim to achieve scoops."

In contrast to Jordan Television's coverage only two weeks ago when the King returned to a tumultuous welcome, there were no live broadcasts and reports, and television cameras were kept

far away from the airport and Al Hussein Medical Centre, where he was receiving treatment.

The longest serving ruler in the Middle East, accompanied on the flight back by Her Majesty Queen Noor and five of his children and doctors, was rushed to the intensive care unit at the hospital, after losing his seven-month battle against cancer.

Police were deployed along the 40-kilometre road to the medical centre, west of the capital.

Hundreds of people have kept vigil in the cold and rain outside the hospital gates. Royal family members were at the King's bedside.

The King decided to fly back home Thursday from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota after suffering internal organ failure. Jordan Television's Channel 2 reported. He had undergone another course of chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant in an effort to arrest a relapse of the cancer.

King Hussein returned to the U.S. hospital on Jan. 26, one week after arriving in Amman to an exuberant homecoming, after doctors declared him fully recovered from non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

During the effusive week, the King surprised Jordanians by replacing Prince Hassan as crown prince after



A woman prays outside Al Hussein Medical Centre for His Majesty King Hussein (Reuters photo)

Palestinians, Israel argue at U.N. on conference proposal

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — The Palestinians on Friday appealed to the U.N. General Assembly to fix an early date for a special U.N. conference to protect Palestinians in Israeli-occupied territories.

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Dore Gold, firmly rejected the initiative as "totally unacceptable to the state of Israel."

The exchange took place at a reconvened emergency special session of the 185-nation U.N. General Assembly, which was due to vote on a non-binding resolution later in the day after some 20 speakers address the forum.

The draft resolution issues a new condemnation of Israel's "illegal" settlement building in Arab lands, and proposes a conference in April of the parties to the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to civilian protection in wartime.

The Palestinian observer to the United Nations, Nasser Al Kidwa, pointed out that the General Assembly had voted three times in the past 19 months to hold the conference, and it was now time to fix a date.

The draft resolution "recommends that the High Contracting Parties convene the said conference on 8 April, 1999 at the United Nations office at Geneva."

After a series of meetings in Geneva, said Al Kidwa, "now, we believe we have reached the end of the line."

But Gold strongly opposed the conference which he said would set a dangerous precedent. In repeated cases of wars of aggression, ethnic cleansing, and even genocide, the high contracting parties did not meet a single time," he said.

The resolution "ignores the many cases of real aggression since 1949, and

seeks to apply the Fourth Geneva Convention selectively in only one case, the case of Israel."

Furthermore, he said, "it ignores the fact that today most Palestinians are under an expanding Palestinian administration, and not under Israeli military administration."

Gold said it was "not just offensive, it is vulgar" to apply to Israel the convention which was set up after the horrors of World War II.

Washington is also opposed to fixing any date for the international conference, pointing to the timing of such an event just ahead of Israeli elections in May. Western diplomats said.

In a bid to dilute support for the Palestinian move, which is supported by the U.N. Arab group and non-aligned states, the Israeli delegation has faxed Israel's position to U.N. missions.

Donors to give Palestinians \$770 million this year

FRANKFURT (R) — International donors on Friday said they would give \$770 million this year to support Palestinian development investment in a move aimed at shoring up the Middle East peace process.

The funds would come on top of the \$2.5 billion in aid payments made since the 1993 Oslo peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians, officials said.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said he was delighted with the result of his meeting with donors. "I am very pleased about what

has happened," Arafat said at a joint news conference with German Development Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul.

Palestinian officials secured the funding after presenting a new five-year development plan designed to build up the economy and infrastructure of the West Bank and Gaza.

Wieczorek-Zeul said Germany had pledged 140 million marks (\$81 million) this year for development projects, making Bonn the largest single foreign aid provider to the Palestinians.

Arafat had urged 30 donor nations and eight international organisations, including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, to help peace efforts by speeding up aid for projects including water and sewage systems.

He said the Oslo peace agreement needed economic as well as political support. "It is not possible to imagine the success of our striving for peace without the two together: politics and economics," Arafat said.

Arafat said the Palestinian economy had suffered

of restrictions imposed by the Israeli government, five years on from the start of the peace process," he said.

Israeli representatives walked out of the donors' meeting. "The Israelis were clearly unhappy about some of the things the Palestinians said in their presentations," a World Bank spokesman said.

Conference sources said the Israelis objected to a map showing Arab east Jerusalem as Palestinian territory. Israel claims the eastern half of the city as part of its capital.

Butler to relinquish U.N. arms inspection post

UNITED NATIONS (R) — After months of unrelenting criticism from Iraq as well as Russia, Richard Butler has decided to leave his post as chief U.N. weapons inspector when his two-year contract expires in June.

But he was adamant that the problem was not his tenure as head of the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) but whether Iraq would ever cooperate on arms inspections.

In an interview with Reuters on Thursday, Butler said he "would not be seeking a renewal of my contract." He said some people believed that if he were removed from his post "everything would be restored, Iraq would cooperate, there would be health in the system."

"This is a very serious subject. Keep your eyes on the main subject," Butler said. "And that is disarmament."

"I want my organisation to make its contribution to reformulating where we go next, to getting the United Nations back into Iraq to do the disarmament and monitoring job that is required," he also told a small group of reporters.

Some 400 activists from Arafat's Fatah movement held an angry protest Friday in the southern Gaza town of Rafah to demand that the Hamas men who killed the security officer on Monday be executed.

United States. He had indicated to Australian newspapers previously he might not stay on past June but his new comments were the clearest statement yet of his intentions.

Russia's Ambassador Sergei Lavrov has conducted a fierce campaign against Butler, calling almost daily for his ouster and accusing him of being biased and unprofessional.

Lavrov, backed by China and France, wants UNSCOM abolished and most of its duties farmed out to other disarmament groups.

His criticisms intensified after a report Butler submitted on Iraq's lack of cooperation on arms inspections that triggered the mid-December U.S.-British air strikes. No inspectors have been allowed back into Iraq since then.

But the United States has continued to back UNSCOM although it agreed to dilute its influence by allowing other disarmament experts to participate in a new Security Council panel that will evaluate Baghdad's arms potential.

Peter Burleigh, the U.S. chief envoy at the United Nations, called Butler and UNSCOM "heroes." A day earlier in Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin

said "the Iraqis have been shooting the messenger in complaining about Ambassador Butler for a long time. We believe Ambassador Butler has done a fine job."

Washington, however, is fairly isolated in the U.N.

The United States is concentrating on how to remove President Saddam Hussein from power and on the almost-daily cat-and-mouse engagements over air exclusion zones in Iraq, with U.S. planes attacking ground defences.

UNSCOM was created by the Security Council after the 1991 Gulf War to account for Iraq's biological, chemical and ballistic weapons, which Baghdad had developed.

It recruited arms experts from various countries, most of them paid for by their respective governments. From the start it was the most-intrusive U.N. arms control operation with its own intelligence operation.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was in charge of nuclear arms which Iraq was close to developing but had not produced yet.

But in conducting more traditional, passive U.N. inspections, it had missed construction of the nuclear programme before the 1991 Gulf War.

U.N. report says 17 killed, 100 injured by stray U.S. missiles

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Two missiles which hit civilian areas in southern Iraq last week killed 17 people, including 10 children, and injured 100 others, according to a U.N. report obtained by the Associated Press.

The report, obtained Thursday, did not say who fired the missiles that landed Jan. 25 in the poor Al Jumhuriya neighbourhood in the port city of Basra and in the village of Abu Khasib, about 25 kilometres to the south.

The Pentagon acknowledged that a U.S. missile fired at air defence targets near Basra missed by kilometres and struck the Al Jumhuriya residential area. But there has been no claim of responsibility for the missile strike on Abu Khasib, which is also called Abu Fulous.

Immediately after the two missile strikes, Iraq said at least 11 people were killed and 59 people were wounded.

But according to the report from Hans von Sponeck and other U.N. officials that the missile killed one woman and five children, according to the report.

Von Sponeck was told that 64 people were injured and 30 were still hospitalised during the U.N. visit, the report said.

The U.N. team visiting the area verified that seven houses had been completely destroyed and a further 27 houses sustained damage. The damage was caused by both direct impact and the blast effect to the missile," it said.

In Abu Khasib, a village of about 400 houses, five women and five children died and 30 people were injured, the report said.

Hamas activists, PNA police clash

NABLUS (AFP) — Hundreds of Islamist activists clashed with Palestinian police Friday during a protest march through Nablus to demand the release of fellow activists held in Palestinian jails.

Dozens of police armed with batons tried to stop around 2,000 marchers — Hamas supporters and relatives of the prisoners — from parading from a local mosque to the centre of the city, witnesses said.

The protesters threw stones and bottles at the police, who eventually withdrew, letting the marchers hold a brief rally in front of city hall before the crowd dispersed under a cold winter rain.

Another 2,000 protesters held a similar march through Hebron in support of prisoners in Palestinian jails, but that demonstration passed off without police interference.

Marchers in Hebron held banners reading "Jail criminals, not heroes," and "No to

Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad group have been on a hunger strike in Nablus' Jneid prison for two weeks to protest their detention.

Tensions have been running high for several weeks between Hamas and the PNA as a result of the arrest of scores of Islamist activists by Palestinian police and their detention without trial.

The authority has pledged to crack down on the armed wing of Hamas and other groups opposed to peace accords with Israel as part of the U.S.-brokered Wye River land-for-security deal signed in October.

The authority's failure to file formal charges or present suspects in court has angered not only Hamas supporters but the elected Palestinian Legislative Council, most of whose members are viewed as loyal to PNA President Yasser Arafat.

An outspoken Australian, Butler, 56, took over the executive chairmanship of UNSCOM in July 1997 from Rolf Ekeus, now Sweden's ambassador in the

Jordan Times, Saturday, February 6, 1999

Palestinian president calls peace process irreversible

WASHINGTON (AP) — Despite a slump in Mideast peacemaking, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat called the process of reconciliation with Israel irreversible and the opening of a "new chapter" in the troubled Middle East.

He also reaffirmed his confidence in the Palestinians achieving statehood and told some 3,000 religious leaders and members of Congress at a luncheon that a Palestinian state would live side by side in peace and reconciliation with Israel.

Earlier Thursday, at the 47th annual National Prayer Breakfast, President Bill Clinton reviewed with Arafat the stalled Wye accords, which called for tighter security measures

by the Palestinians and a pullback on the West Bank by Israel.

White House spokesman David Leavy said Clinton had reminded Arafat that unilateral declarations of statehood "aren't helpful." But while the administration doesn't want Arafat to declare that there will be a state whatever the outcome of negotiations with Israel, it does not object to what officials call assertions of Palestinian aspirations.

In fact, on a visit in December to Gaza, Clinton spoke approvingly of the Palestinians having a chance to "determine their own destiny on their own land." Hassan Abdul Rahman, the chief representative of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in Wash-

ington, said "it was a very friendly meeting and a very cordial meeting." Rahman said there was no discussion of Israeli allegations that the Palestinians apprehend and then quietly release terrorism suspects in a "revolving door" justice system. Clinton, in a speech at the prayer breakfast, made a now-familiar pitch to Israel and the Palestinians to put aside their differences for the sake of a settlement.

"You do not make peace with your friends, but friendship can come, with time and trust and humility, when we do not pretend that our wilfulness is an expression of God's will," he said.

Arafat was warmly received at the luncheon.

despite calls for a boycott, and he reflected on Palestinian peacemaking with Israel under the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The widow of the slain Israeli leader, Leah, was in the audience as Arafat praised "the courage and commitment" that Rabin demonstrated.

He said he, too, was committed to pursuing peace, and called it irreversible for the sake of Palestinian and Israeli children. Before Arafat left for home, he was invited to return in April for more talks with Clinton. Also, on Feb. 16 a joint U.S.-Palestinian commission will meet in Washington to strengthen cultural and scientific relations with the Palestinian National Authority.



BEST WISHES TO THE KING: A Jordanian man waves a portrait of His Majesty King Hussein and a Jordanian flag while walking in a central Amman street Friday as the King is brought back from the United States to his home town. Prayers were held for the recovery of the Hashemite King but a palace source said today that King Hussein was close to death on his arrival in Jordan and was being kept alive on a life support system after all major organs except his heart failed (Reuters photo)

Lebanon blames Israel for worsening situation in south

BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanese Prime Minister Salim Hoss said Friday Israel was responsible for the deterioration of the situation in the south and maintained that all people have the right to resist occupation.

"It is most extraordinary that the aggressor should make accusations against the victims of aggression and blame them for acts of resistance which is a legitimate right of all peoples whose land is occupied," he told journalists.

Hoss, who is also foreign

minister, was reacting to a letter sent by Israel Thursday to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, which said Lebanon was responsible for the escalation of violence in the border strip, and deserved Israel's right to defend itself.

"If Israel is unhappy with the situation in southern Lebanon, all it has to do is implement unconditionally Security Council Resolution 425 and withdraw from the region without falsifying the truth," he said.

The resolution, passed in 1978, calls for Israel to pull out of the border zone uni-

laterally and unconditionally. Gold repeated his country's willingness to comply with the resolution, but stressed that peace and security must first be established along the border.

Lebanon has refused to give any guarantees to Israel and links any negotiations with a renewal of talks between Israel and Syria. Syria is demanding the return of the whole of the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel in 1967 and illegally annexed in 1981, in return for a peace treaty.

right terrorism against Israel," he added.

Hoss told journalists that it was Israel, which occupies a strip of Lebanese territory along their common border, who was responsible for the violence.

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on arms," she said.

A latest group of some

1,050 people, mainly women

and children, were released

earlier this month after CSI

paid \$50 each for their free-

dom in the southern Bahir Al

Ghazal province, the aid

agency said in Geneva.

noted.

"In Sudan, the authorities have always denied the existence of this problem and do not even accept pronouncement of the word 'slavery,'" Heuze said.

The huge east African country ratified in 1990 the convention on the rights of the child, pledging to implement all the treaty's articles intended to protect youngsters.

A report on measures taken in this respect was handed over in 1997 to the U.N. body overseeing treaty compliance, but the text has never been approved nor published, the spokeswoman said.

"Slavery in Sudan exists. You can use any terms you wish. It also exists elsewhere," such as in west Africa and Asia, she said.

Although welcoming the publicity CSI gives to the scourge, UNICEF criticised its tactics.

The organisation could never support the "absolutely intolerable" measure of buying back a human being, Heuze said, arguing that this strategy supported trade in human trafficking.

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Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 12 Aqaba 20. Humidity readings: Amman 97 percent, Aqaba 45 percent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun 02/06 Jerash 06/13 Irbid 04/15 Jordan Valley 10/20

Food Control Centre 4637111 Civil Defence Department 5661111 Civil Defence Immediate Response 4630341 Civil Defence Emergency 4637777

Rescue Police 192 4621111, 4637777 Fire Brigade 4617101 Blood Bank 4775121 Highway Police 5343402 Traffic Police 4896390

Public Security Dept 4630521 Hotel Complaints 5605800 Price Complaints 5661176 War & Severe Complaints 489467 Amman Municipality Complaints 787111 Telephone Information (directory assistance) 463121 Overseas Calls 0132 Central Aramaic Telephone Repairs 4623101 Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101 Jordan Television 4773111

Rainy, cold, and cloudy weather conditions will prevail. Winds will be westerly to

Turkish Cypriots reject proposal for peace force

Nine Kurdish rebels killed in southeastern Turkey

DIYARBAKIR (AFP) — Nine rebels of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) were killed in clashes with Turkish security forces in the southeastern Anatolian province of Batman, the emergency-rule governor's office in Diyarbakir said Friday.

The fighting occurred on Thursday during a security operation in rural areas of the province, it added.

There were no casualties reported on the Turkish government side.

Fifteen PKK rebels and eight soldiers were killed Wednesday in clashes in Batman and the Tunceli province in eastern Turkey. The PKK has been fighting for a Kurdish homeland in southeastern Turkey since 1984. The violence has claimed almost 31,000 lives.

A state of emergency rule has been in force in the region for over decade to facilitate the Turkish military's combat against the rebels whom Ankara regards as "separatist terrorists."

The PKK is led by Abdullah Ocalan who left Italy on Jan. 16 for an unknown destination via Russia and whom Turkey wants to try on terrorism and murder charges.

which was created in 1983, is not recognised by the international community, and relies on Turkey both militarily and economically.

It said the TRNC would never "fall for traps" that would deprive it of the guarantee provided by Turkey, and leave it defenseless. The TRNC, a guarantor

power for the island along with Greece and Britain, keeps a garrison of some 35,000 soldiers in the north.

Cyprus has been divided

since 1974 when Turkey invaded and occupied its northern third following a coup attempt in Nicosia

aimed at uniting the island with Greece.

Weizman's aide Arieh Shumer said the president hoped the release of Jewish and Arab political prisoners would spark both Israel and the Palestinians to implement the U.S.-brokered land-for-peace accord, which has been stalled for several weeks.

WEIZMAN may free Egyptian as part of clemency

TEL AVIV (AP) — President Ezer Weizman's office said Thursday that he is considering pardoning or reducing the sentences of 30 Arab prisoners convicted of anti-Israeli acts as part of an effort to end the stalemate in the peace process.

The fighting occurred on Thursday during a security operation in rural areas of the province, it added.

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Plans under way to amend law encouraging honour crimes

By Rana Husseini

AMMAN — Justice Minister Jawdat Sboul has said the government is considering urgent plans to amend legislation that allow a reduction in penalty for killers who commit crimes of honour.

Sboul said during a lecture late Wednesday that his ministry and the Cabinet were doing their utmost to finalise a draft law before sending it to Parliament for approval.

"I want to assure everyone here that this issue (honour crimes and related legislation) is a major concern to us," he said.

"And Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor are pushing for such changes so we have to finish them within a very short period," Sboul added.

He was referring to Article 340 of the Jordanian

Penal Code No. 16 of 1960, which provides reduced or waived penalties to persons found guilty of killing female relatives who commit adultery or are found in adulterous situations.

Most men who commit such crimes benefit from a reduction in penalty. On many occasions, they end up receiving sentences ranging from three months to one year, depending on the circumstances of the case.

Between 25 to 30 women are reportedly killed in the Kingdom each year in the name of family honour.

The Royal Palace has asked the government of Prime Minister Fayed Tarawneh and the government preceding it to prepare amendments that would eliminate contradictions in the judicial process concerning violence against women.

Sboul, addressing members of the Rotary Club of Amman, said the government was also revising the entire Penal Code to meet changes of the modern world.

"Overhauling the entire legislation is not an easy task," he explained. "But we are exerting utmost efforts to tackle what is needed and to make the necessary changes to meet the requirement of everyday changes," he said.

Sboul said he was aware of the snail-pace process at Jordanian courts.

"We realise that the judicial process is slow and we are working to improve it," he said in response to a question raised by a member of the audience. "The salaries of judges have already been increased and all measures have been taken to guarantee their independence," he noted.

The ministry has hired eight court inspectors in the past six months to check on the judiciary and on court procedures.

"We have provided the best atmosphere for these inspectors, and I have promised them that I will not neglect any report they submit to me on any violation or misconduct they come across," he said.

Sboul said he was trying to battle detention orders issued by prosecutors after working hours on Thursday as detainees end up in jail for two days until offices reopen on Saturday to accept a bail request.

"Many times people who are detained on Thursday are innocent but are forced to spend two days in prison and I hope that I can at least introduce changes that could apply to individuals who commit minor offences," he said.

British officers assess Jordan's family protection facilities

By Rana Husseini

AMMAN — Two British police officials, on a week-long visit to examine Jordan's family protection facilities, have met officials for talks on how to improve these facilities and deepen bilateral cooperation.

Tony Butler, Chief Constable at the Gloucestershire Constabulary, told journalists at the Family Protection Unit — affiliated with the Public Security Department — that the visit was designed to enhance future cooperation in the area of family protection.

The team is in Jordan at the invitation of His Royal Highness Prince Hassan to examine the Jordanian experience in the field of family protection.

Butler praised Jordan's family protection efforts and said he sensed a great feeling of commitment to improve the situation from all officials he met, including the chief of the PSD, representatives from the ministries of interior, justice and social development, judges and criminal prosecutors.

"I sensed a strong willingness and positive commitment

by officials to improve the procedures in dealing with victims of domestic violence and to alleviate their trauma and make them more relaxed," he said.

He said Jordanian leading judges he met "did not seem to oppose the idea of introducing new methods to hear victims of abuse at courts."

In many developed countries, victims are usually allowed to testify in a separate room on a video camera connected to the court room to help them avoid their alleged aggressors.

Detective Inspector Paul Purnell, child Protection coordinator at the Gloucestershire Constabulary, said that the Jordanian experience in the field "will become a model for countries in the region."

"We are looking at making the Jordanian model a model for other countries in the region," said Purnell. "We are also aiming to teach trainees to enable them to train their colleagues on how to deal with the issue of domestic violence," said Purnell.

Referring to Britain's family protection experiment, Purnell noted that more acci-

dents were reported by individuals because of an increase in confidence towards police and Child Protection Unit.

Lieutenant Colonel Fadel Hmoud, head of the Family Protection Unit, told the Jordan Times that the PSD had many ideas to improve the family protection facilities and to increase the size of the current building, located in Shmeisani.

The unit, which opened in September 1997, deals monthly with cases of sexual offences on or against women and children under 18 as well as child abuse.

"We are studying the possibility of expanding the current building in order to start receiving victims of domestic violence," Hmoud added.

"We are still new in this field and we do not have a shelter for women. This is why we have not dealt with cases of domestic violence yet," he said.

The unit has so far received 295 cases, a fraction of which formed incidents of violence that occurred within the family.

Of the total cases, 242 were referred to courts, 38 to

social development experts and 15 to administrative rulers.

The PSD signed an agreement with the ministry of social development and the Jordan River Design recently to enable social experts working in the unit to give social support to victims and their families.

The centre is staffed by police officials specialised in sociology, psychology and law.

Two months ago, police officials decided to stop wearing unofficial uniforms to ensure a relaxed atmosphere for the victims.

"We decided to wear civil clothes to provide psychological assurance to victims we meet," he said. "We also do not want to draw the neighbour's attention when we go out to the field to investigate."

Hmoud said future plans included setting up "similar units in other governorates, depending on the number of reported cases in each area."

"We are studying and analysing our experience and based on it we will move to other cities and provide the same services," he said.

50 journalists join press association

AMMAN (Petra) — Seventy new journalists joined the Jordan Press Association (JPA) on Thursday after taking the oath before Minister of Information Nasser Judeh.

The latest batch of journalists raised the JPA's membership to 455 members.

Judeh said, "with the oath, journalists pledge to work conscientiously and responsibly in serving their country and in seeking to promote the profession."

He said he was pleased to hear that the JPA has embarked on constructing a complex to house the association's offices, a press club and an institute for training new journalists. "These are basic factors in promoting the profession and improving the skill and efficiency of journalists," Judeh said.

Judeh expressed hope that the JPA will enforce a

code of honour outlined in the association's new law to ensure that all journalists remain committed to integrity, objectivity and accuracy in their work and to respect the country's laws and regulations.

JPA President Self Sharif welcomed the new members and paid tribute to His Majesty King Hussein who he said has supported the association by enabling it to acquire a plot of land to build the new complex.

He noted that the association has already engaged the services of a local engineering office to supervise the implementation of the project.

Sharif also paid tribute to five journalists who passed away recently and lauded their efforts as pioneers and early founders of the association in Jordan.

Sharif thanked the government and the Greater

Amman Municipality for allotting a plot of land for the association complex which he said will be built within one year.

Sharif said the mayor of Amman has promised to name one of the capital's

streets after the late Musa Abdul Salam, a journalist who served as assistant director of the Jordan News Agency (Petra) and as a staff member of many local newspapers. He died earlier this week.

Jordanian editor detained on court order

AMMAN (AFP) — The editor of a weekly Jordanian newspaper was given a 15-day detention order by a court here Thursday for violating the national press code.

Fahd Rimawi of the Al Majed weekly is charged with "insulting the Monarch, publishing false information about the prime minister and members of the government and attacks on the security service," Information Ministry Chief Iyad Kattan said.

Rimawi wrote in Tuesday's edition of the paper that Prince Hassan — who was dismissed as acting regent and heir to the Throne last month by King Hussein — laid his revolver down before the King and asked to be shot if King thought he was a traitor.

In previous issues Rimawi had called for the prime minister and his cabinet to resign. He is due to be freed on bail while awaiting trial.

What's Going On

CONCERT

Musical performance by pianist Saleem Abboud Ashkar at the Royal Cultural Centre on Sunday Feb. 7 at 8:00 p.m. (Performance includes pieces by Beethoven, Schubert, Bach, Chopin, and Schumann).

FILM

"The House of Spirits" at Books@Café, Jabal Amman on Sunday Feb. 7 at 8:30 p.m. (Tel. 4650458).

EXHIBITIONS

Paintings by Olivier Debré at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh, until Feb. 25. "Winter 1998" exhibition at the Arts Centre, Shmeisani (Tel. 5529610), until Feb. 14. Works by Mohammad Al Saifi at Books@Café, Jabal Amman, until Feb. 13 (Tel. 4650457). Works by Victor Vasarely at the exhibition hall of the Ministry of Culture, until Feb. 8. The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Feb. 25.

Jordanians pray for King Hussein in vigil lasting till late night hours

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — Grieving Jordanians prayed late into the hours Friday for His Majesty King Hussein, who was rushed to a military hospital in critical condition after arriving in Amman from a U.S. hospital early yesterday.

Outside the Al Hussein Medical Centre, thousands of tearful men, women and children huddled under pouring rain to hold a vigil for the King, who has been fighting cancer for seven months.

They watched a stream of Royal family members and government officials enter the complex's heavily-guarded gates, including HRH Prince Abdullah, named Crown Prince by King Hussein before he rushed to the Mayo Clinic on Jan. 25 after suffering from a relapse of cancer.

Prince Abdullah replaced his uncle, HRH Prince Hasuan, who was removed by the King after 34 years as heir to the Throne.

Many carried Jordanian flags and large portraits of King Hussein, 63, who has ruled the Kingdom for 47 years. Others carried banners reading "Al Hussein is Jordan and Jordan is Al Hussein" and "our hearts are with you our beloved King."

Muslim clerics across the nation asked Friday's worshippers to pray for the recovery of the King.

In Amman's main Al Hussein Mosque, the imam appeared preparing the ground for the succession in a sermon carried live on state-run Jordan Television.

"We pray to God for the speedy recovery of the King and for the success of the Crown Prince," he told hundreds of worshippers who defied heavy rainfall and cold weather conditions to attend the prayers.

Jordanians had been in a state of shock and disbelief following the apparent failure of the King's second bone marrow transplant after his sudden return to the Mayo Clinic last week.

The sombre mood contrasted sharply with the upbeat mood that hit Jordan when the King returned to a tumultuous welcome on Jan. 19 after having been declared cured from cancer following six months of chemotherapy at Mayo.

"I cannot believe this news. What would we do without our King and our father?" said Sami Jamil, 30, as he listened to an international radio broadcast, a main source of information for eager citizens, many of whom were disappointed by the performance of the more-conservative local

the official Petra news agency saying the King was returning home at his wish to continue his treatment.

"I cannot imagine a day without him around us," said Safia Ahmad, as she wept. "He is a great leader, a father and a brother who always took care of the country and its people like nobody has," said one shopkeeper.

On that day, around 400,000 Jordanians from all walks of life challenged the driving rain and thronged the streets to welcome the King.

But some Jordanians tried to look hopefully to the future. "It is a sad day," said Salim, an advertising manager. "But whatever happens, we must overcome our sorrows as life has to go on," he added. "I believe such an attitude will also satisfy our leader, King Hussein, and will maintain country's progress, for which the irreplaceable leader fought for long time."

Iraqi-Jordanian team to meet

AMMAN (J.T.) — A joint Jordanian-Iraqi committee will meet in Baghdad by mid-February to discuss details of a draft trade protocol for 1999 hammered out by a joint technical committee last week.

Minister of Industry and Trade Mohammad Saleh Hourani told the state-run news agency Petra on Friday that technical sub-committees had determined Jordan's needs of Iraqi crude oil to Jordan this year at an average price of \$8.4 per barrel.

The Kingdom exports basic essentials to Iraq under an oil-for-food deal which allows sanctions-hit Iraq to sell limited quantities of oil and use the proceeds for food and medicine under strict U.N. control.

Official sources said Jordan's \$225 million protocol signed in 1998 will be lowered to \$190

million this year in line with a decline in world oil prices.

At the beginning of January, the two countries renewed an agreement on the delivery of 4.8 million tonnes of Iraqi crude oil to Jordan this year at an average price of \$8.4 per barrel.

The Kingdom exports basic essentials to Iraq under an oil-for-food deal which allows sanctions-hit Iraq to sell limited quantities of oil and use the proceeds for food and medicine under strict U.N. control.

The pipeline, with a capacity of 150,000 barrels per day, would cost Jordan \$55 million a year which it currently spends on transporting crude by road. The cost of building the Haditha-Zarqa section is put at

\$350 million.

Hourani said both countries were keen on boosting bilateral trade exchanges. However, he said nine-year-old U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq were "standing in the way of expanding trade."

Jordan's oil purchases from Iraq are exempted from U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq since its invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

The U.N. has allowed Iraq since December 1996 to sell limited quantities of oil to buy food and medicine for the Iraqi people.

Bankers, brokers look ahead with confidence

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — Bankers and stock brokers yesterday sought to reassure Jordanians that the dinar and the stock market will remain sound in spite of His Majesty King Hussein's deteriorating health.

Amr Sali, head of the Arab Banking Corporation told the Jordan Times that in spite of speculations early Thursday morning that King Hussein would be returning to Amman after his health took a turn for the worse, he had seen no rush on the dollar. Business hours ended before an official announcement that the King would return to Jordan.

"What I saw was business as usual," the banker said. "I think the fact that people have been adjusting to this fact for a while has alleviated much of this pressure and people saw over the past seven months that there was a sound monetary policy in place."

Earlier last summer, when King Hussein made an announced departure to the Mayo Clinic in the United States where he underwent six months of chemotherapy treatment for a non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Jordan witnessed a capital flight of approximately \$400 million in a matter of days.

However, more than \$100 million has returned to the country since then, a fact that officials and private sector economists and bankers attribute to a solid monetary policy and a Central Bank decision not to prevent buying of the U.S. greenback.

Another banker said that he believes demand for the dollar was higher than usual, but that he did not expect this trend to develop into panic buying.

"I don't expect the Central Bank to issue any decision to stop foreign currency transfers if demand continues to rise," the banker said.

Jordan's foreign currency reserves stand at \$1.2 billion.

Sali also shunned off news bashing from Occupied Jerusalem that the Jordanian dinar had plunged more than ten per cent against the Israeli shekel, trading at midday for 5.00 shekels against 5.70 shekels the previous evening.

"Worries are always natural," he said. "Especially from those outside the country. Even if there is a drop in the dinar, it will be short-term and it will bounce back as soon as people see that things are steady and that there are mechanisms in place."

Meanwhile, the Amman Financial Market last week saw a decline in trading volume, but registered an overall gain in the share price index.

Volume at closing time was estimated at JD10.3 million compared to JD16 million the previous week, but the share price index rallied slightly over last week, closing at 178.2 points.

Hun Sen condemns Khmer Rouge trial efforts

KUALA LUMPUR (R) — Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen Friday criticised attempts to put former leaders of the Khmer Rouge on trial, saying it could lead to renewed conflict in Cambodia.

"We should not push for any action which would lead to more killing of the Cambodian people," he said in the Malaysian capital.

"If the court of law for such a trial is to be made and if it is the mandate of the United Nations Security Council, then if the war erupts, it is the Security Council that must be responsible," he said in remarks translated into English.

Hun Sen was speaking to the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations on the second day of a three-day visit to Kuala Lumpur.

Former Khmer Rouge foreign minister Ieng Sary Friday said a trial should be avoided, repeating recent warnings from former cadres of the group that conflict could erupt if any effort is made to prosecute Khmer Rouge leaders.

In 1996, Ieng Sary defected to the government along with several thousand guerrillas. He has been joined by two of his top Khmer Rouge comrades, Khou Samphan and Nuon Chea, who surrendered to the government in late December.

The surrender of the pair sparked calls for leaders of the group responsible for the death of an estimated 1.7 million people during their 1975-79 "killing fields" rule, to stand trial on charges of genocide or crimes against humanity.

Hun Sen had initially been reluctant to push for prosecution of Khmer Rouge leaders, drawing indignation from human rights groups and some Western governments.

He later said the government backed a tribunal for the Khmer Rouge leaders and was awaiting the proposals of a team of jurists.

Formosa Plastics sets partial timetable to remove Cambodian waste

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Formosa Plastic Corp. said Friday it will remove 3,000 tonnes of toxic waste that it sent to Cambodia within two months of signing a final agreement on the disposal, but it denied any illegal dumping in the scandal that has been blamed for six deaths.

Formosa will repack the mercury-laced waste in steel drums, ship it out of Cambodia and clean up the waste site, company president Lee Chih-Tsun told reporters.

The waste was discovered in December in a case that stirred allegations that Taiwanese industries were using less-developed nations as a toxic dumping ground.

Lee spoke following meetings between Formosa executives, Om Yenfeng, a senior adviser to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, and two Cambodian environment officials dispatched to the company's headquarters in Taipei.

Lee said the sides did not discuss possible compensation demands against the company. Om said that matter would be put before a court of international law for arbitration.

Cambodia plans to demand "millions of dollars" in compensation for environmental damages, Cambodian Environment

appointed by the United Nations to assess evidence and consider how legal proceedings might be undertaken.

Hun Sen criticised international pressure on his government to arrest the former Khmer Rouge leaders, who still remain at liberty in Pailin, as counter-productive.

"If we arrest just the few people, it would disrupt the peace. And then all the people would return to the jungle and cause the fighting again," he said.

He also lashed out at media reports on his VIP welcome given to Khou Samphan and Nuon Chea when they surrendered in December.

"I received Khou Samphan and Nuon Chea in their capacity as humble people. I received them not as leaders of the Khmer Rouge," he said.

Hun Sen repeated his suggestion that any investigation be expanded to cover the periods before and after 1975-1979, which could implicate the United States among others.

"The notion of reconciliation in my mind has a broader meaning which takes into account the offenders and others involved in the set of facts from 1970 to 1998, and their foreign friends included," he said.

Many members of the ruling Cambodian People's Party, including Hun Sen, were once Khmer Rouge members who broke away during the group's rule and later backed a Vietnamese invasion that forced the Khmer Rouge from power in early 1979.

Hun Sen said the insistence of several members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) that a new upper house of parliament, or senate, be formed in Cambodia before it is allowed admission to the grouping was tantamount to interference in Cambodia's internal affairs.



From left to right: former Chechen Vice-President Vakha Arsanov, field commander Shamil Basayev and ex-President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, attend a rally in central Grozny Feb. 4. The president of the rebel Russian region of Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov, dismissed Vice-President Arsanov by abolishing post (Reuters photo)

Chechen leader sacks deputy

GROZNY, Russia (R) — The president of the rebel Russian region of Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov, has dismissed his vice-president by abolishing the post, Maskhadov's spokesman said on local television late Thursday.

The sacked vice-president, Vakha Arsanov, later appeared on the channel saying he would now raise a personal armed force of 300 men, which he called a "peacekeeping brigade".

The moves appeared to

harden divisions among the guerrilla commanders who have shared power in the million-strong Muslim region since they forced Moscow to withdraw its troops in 1996 after more than 20 months of fighting.

But the streets of the war-battered capital Grozny were calm Friday morning.

Arsanov, who like many Chechen faction leaders already personally controls a substantial armed force, has joined in recent bitter criticism of Maskhadov by other guerrilla command-

ers, including Russia's most wanted man, Shamil Basayev.

Maskhadov, a former Soviet artillery colonel who beat Basayev and others in a 1997 presidential election, is seen as a moderate in Moscow, where the Russian government still refuses to countenance Chechen claims of independence.

The president, apparently bowing to pressure from his critics for failing to adopt a more radical approach, declared on Wednesday that

Islamic Sharia law, already in operation in the region, would henceforth be the sole authority.

It was not clear precisely what effect that would have.

Chechnya is awash with weapons, and crime, especially kidnapping, is rampant. Three Britons and a New Zealander were murdered last year after being seized in the capital.

Russian law enforcement officials estimate there are about 100 hostages being held in Chechnya.

Croatia debates cooperation with the Hague tribunal

ZAGREB (R) — The Croatian parliament Friday debated further cooperation with the United Nations war crimes tribunal after fierce argument in the lower house over what many politicians see as the court's bias against Croatia.

At the end of the two-day debate, lawmakers are expected to issue a resolution later Friday on whether to continue cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague.

Foreign Minister Mate Granic told parliament Croatia wanted to continue cooperating with the court but would insist on pointing out "omissions and

inconsistencies" in its work.

Some opposition parties shared the view that the court had punished Croats for their compliance with extradition demands.

Several members argued Croatia could extend its cooperation but should not extradite any more Croats.

Out of 26 people now in the tribunal's custody, 12 are Croats, 12 are Serbs and two are Muslims.

Zagreb has sent a dozen war crimes suspects to The Hague, including a high-ranking Bosnian Croat general whose trial has dragged on for more than two years.

Of 10 Bosnian Croats who voluntarily surrendered in October 1997 on

assurances they would receive a swift trial, none has yet been tried.

President Franjo Tudjman and other high-ranking officials have recently spoken of secret indictments against five or six Croatian generals, and possibly other officials, which they believe are being prepared in The Hague.

Chief prosecutor Louise Arbour denied such indictments were being prepared and the U.S. State Department also rejected Tudjman's charges as being made for political goals.

But Thursday, deputy speaker Vladimir Sekes brought up the subject again, saying "no one in the Croatian leadership will be

able to feel safe" if top officials were indicted.

"Croatia is extremely dissatisfied and voices its concern over rumours about a possible trial of several Croatian generals and state officials responsible for carrying out Operation Storm," Granic said in reference to one of two offensives Croatia launched in 1995 to recapture Serb-held territory.

He also repeated criticism that indictments had not been issued for war crimes against Croats in Bosnia and slammed the court's failure to apprehend former Yugoslav army officers indicted in crimes in the Croatian city of Vukovar in 1991.

Congo intelligence agents pick up politician, free journalists

KINSHASA (AFP) — Intelligence agents have arrested a spokesman of a prominent opposition party in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), but freed five journalists picked up this week, several sources said Friday.

Unidentified security agents arrested a spokesman of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) party, Joseph Kapika, sources close to him said, while the newspaper Le Potentiel said five of its journalists were released.

Kapika and two other UDPS officials, led by long-standing politician and one-time Prime Minister Etienne Tshisekedi, had already been briefly detained last week.

Sources Friday said they had no idea why Kapika had been picked up again. However, the move follows a UDPS protest at the terms on which President Laurent Kabila has allowed the resumption of party political activities.

Sunday, Kabila lifted a

ban on such activities which he imposed after seizing power in May 1997, when he toppled then Zaire's dictator Marshal Mobutu Sese Seko, ending more than three decades of his rule.

The UDPS subsequently slammed the decree as "a text which kills liberty and democracy... which entrenches the violation of fundamental freedoms and exclusion."

"Our party has never recognised the existence of any law banning activity by political parties," a UDPS communiqué stated this week. It demanded a "full multi-party system".

The decree stipulates that political parties — more than 400 existed before the late Mobutu was ousted and Zaire was renamed — should each hold a constitutional congress, gathering in at least 300 delegates from the 11 states of the vast, impoverished country.

Parties should then seek approval from the ministry of the interior by submitting the conclusions of their congresses and paying a non-refund-

able deposit of 30,000 Congolese francs (about \$10,000), the text said.

The government stated the goal is to stop the formation of "tribalist" parties, but observers noted the decree also aimed at stopping any recognition of the political wing of rebels who have been up in arms since last August.

Wednesday, civilian agents "burst into the editorial premises of Le Potentiel and arrested" the publication's managing editor Moise Musangana, deputy editor-in-chief Veron-Clement Kongo and three reporters, Godefroid Ngamisata, Theodore Ngangu and Emmanuel Kalishunga, the paper said.

The five were detained by the National Intelligence Agency (ANR) and released late Thursday, sources said. The ANR gave no reason for the arrests.

On Thursday, the managing editor of another Kinshasa newspaper said he had been freed after spending a year in jail following his conviction on charges of threatening

state security.

Albert Bonsange Yema of L'Alarme, who was freed Wednesday, had called in an editorial for the arrest of Kabila.

Initially confined to a penal corrections centre in the capital, Yema was later transferred to the city's main hospital for medical treatment.

Kabila's lifting of the political ban follows pledges he made during a European tour in November, when he came under pressure to follow up on his promises to move towards democracy.

Since August, his regime has been under attack from rebels who initially began a Tutsi-led uprising in the east. Several African states have become militarily involved on the rival sides.

Zambia has been overseeing mediation efforts to bring about a ceasefire. Progress has stalled on Kabila's refusal to talk directly to the DRC rebels, whom Kinshasa presents as puppets of neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Yeltsin phones Russian officials, Kohl

MOSCOW (R) — Boris Yeltsin, convalescing from a stomach ulcer at a suburban sanatorium, made several telephone calls Friday to Russian and foreign officials, including former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the Kremlin said. A spokeswoman said the Russian president, who turned 68 Monday, had spoken by telephone to Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and the speaker of the state Duma, lower house of parliament, Gennady Seleznyov. Yeltsin also had a "warm and friendly" conversation with Kohl, she said. Yeltsin had a close personal relationship with Kohl, who was voted out of office in September. His successor, Gerhard Schroeder, is due to meet Yeltsin in Moscow on Feb. 18. Yeltsin went to the Barvikha sanatorium Saturday to recuperate after two weeks in hospital. He has visited his Kremlin office twice last week, Tuesday and Thursday.

Pope resumes activity after bout of flu

VATICAN CITY (R) — Pope John Paul Friday resumed activities after a bout of flu, the Vatican said. The Vatican said the 78-year-old Pontiff would resume his scheduled audiences, which include a meeting with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who is due to travel to the United States next week to discuss a number of issues, including homosexuality and feminism, with Roman Catholic officials from North America and Oceania. Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which oversees doctrinal issues, will travel to San Francisco Tuesday. His visit ended Friday. The Pope, who has suffered a series of health problems in recent years, cut short his weekly address to pilgrims Sunday, his first engagement after returning from a visit to Mexico and the U.S. Midwest city of St. Louis, saying he was feeling unwell. He told pilgrims he had "a bit of a cold". The Vatican announced Monday that he had cancelled audiences. Aides insist that the Pope's mind is razor-sharp, despite his health problems which, according to some reports, include a form of Parkinson's disease which can cause his left hand to shake uncontrollably.

Germany says Contact Group deadline for Kosovo peace non-negotiable

BONN (AFP) — German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer said here Friday that the Contact Group's conditions set last week for the warring sides in Kosovo to reach peace by February 20 were non-negotiable. "The basis for a peaceful solution and a successful conclusion to the talks in Rambouillet (France, this weekend) are based on the non-negotiable statement of principle of the Contact Group" issued last Friday in London, Fischer said in a communiqué. The six-nation Contact Group had last Friday imposed a deadline of a maximum 21 days for Belgrade and ethnic Albanian leaders to reach peace in the Serbian province of Kosovo. The foreign ministers from Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Italy and the United States also said the two sides would start peace talks at Rambouillet, near Paris, starting Saturday. Fischer said in his communiqué: "The Kosovo peace talks starting tomorrow are the crucial and indeed also the last, chance for a peaceful and mutual solution in the Kosovo conflict." He said the two sides should not doubt the resolve of the Contact Group not to allow "a further escalation of armed conflict in Kosovo." The Contact Group had said: "The future of the people of Kosovo is in the hands of leaders in Belgrade and Kosovo. They must commit themselves now to complete the negotiations on a political settlement within 21 days to bring peace to Kosovo. The Contact Group will hold both sides accountable if they fail to take the opportunity now offered to them." NATO has threatened air strikes to neutralise the military power of the warring Serbs and ethnic Albanians.

Polish farmers continue talks, roadblocks suspended

WARSAW (AFP) — Polish farmers agreed to hold more talks with the government Friday aimed at resolving a two-week protest over cheap agricultural imports, after suspending nationwide roadblocks, officials said. In initial talks Thursday, Agriculture Minister Jacek Janiszewski made a number of proposals to end the protest, which has led to widespread traffic disruption, according to Polish media reports. These included proposed new import tariffs, cuts in land leases, changes in a quota system for Polish farm products, loan repayment facilities and support for meat exports to former Soviet Union markets. Janiszewski notably said Moscow authorities were interested in importing Polish pork. Labour union negotiators were expected to resume discussion in particular on pork prices, with a proposal that a government agency buy unsold produce. A compromise on this issue has yet to be worked out. The government is meanwhile refusing farmers' demands that it recognises the legal status of roadblocks which have seriously disrupted traffic nationwide since the protests started on Jan. 22. Marian Krzaklewski, head of the Catholic right-wing AWS-Solidarity, the main party in the ruling coalition, has called for local courts to deal "leniently" with roadblock protesters. The government of Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek has been loathe to increase its budget to support the agricultural sector, which it believes must be radically restructured as Poland prepares for European Union membership. Protesting farmers blocked a record 466 roads in Poland Wednesday, deepening the crisis facing the Buzek's government which took office in November 1997.

Catholic nun raped in eastern India

NEW DELHI, India (AP) — A Catholic nun was raped by two men dressed as women while she was travelling in a taxi burn alive with his two sons last month, police said Friday. The nun was gagged and blindfolded in Krishnachandrapur, a village in eastern Orissa state late Thursday, by two men dressed in sari, the traditional Indian wraparound. Press Trust of India quoted police as saying, "The men were apparently disguised as women so that their victim would not at first be suspicious." The nun escaped her assailants, took a bus police Friday. Police started an investigation but no arrests had been made. The village is adjacent to the rural district where Australian Baptist missionary Graham Stains and his young sons were burned alive by a mob two weeks ago. On Christians and their property throughout India in the last year. Minority Christian community leaders list over 100 attacks on Christians during the last year. The government found many attacks were over local disputes related to land and property and not religion. Hindu rightists groups close to the governing Bharatiya Janata Party have been accused of fanning hatred against Christians, who are about 2 per cent of India's 1 billion people.

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South African President Nelson Mandela, accompanied by his wife Graca Machel (right) and heir-apparent Deputy President Thabo Mbeki (left) and Trevor Lekota, head of the national Council of Provinces, take the salute at the opening of the 1998 session of the South African Parliament. This session of parliament is Mandela's last as president as he is to retire later this year (Reuters photo)

Sonia Gandhi keeps up pressure on Indian government

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's main opposition leader Sonia Gandhi kept up her assault on the government Friday, predicting the imminent collapse of the shaky Hindu nationalist-led coalition.

The Italian-born leader of the Congress party said in a party newsletter members would have to prepare for "responsibilities" which "perhaps sooner than later, will fall upon us."

Gandhi said public confidence in the government of Prime Minister Atal Behari

Vajpayee was at the "lowest ebb ever," adding: "The challenges in the new year will be of a different nature. The country's economy is in crisis, its foreign policy in the doldrums and most disturbingly, its millennial secularism under attack."

The Congress humiliated Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party in crucial state elections late last year.

Vajpayee's coalition has been racked by infighting from the very moment it took power in March last year. Its fragility stems from

the fact that regional parties, with only a handful of seats, have an inordinate influence which they use to push their individual local agendas.

The loose-knit coalition has recently been in the eye of a storm over a host of issues ranging from mounting attacks on Christians by Hindu militants to an unpopular and unilateral decision to cut public spending.

Addressing party supporters in the southern state of Karnataka, Sonia Gandhi blasted the BJP-led alliance

saying it was "shaky and unprincipled."

"The people have realised that there is a grave danger to their future from the shaky and unprincipled coalition," the Press Trust of India quoted her as saying.

She told Congress supporters to restore "a stable, sane and sensible government." Political commentators say Gandhi's party is waiting in the wings to take power, but would prefer to see the coalition self-destruct rather than force it out of office.

Rights group asks Sri Lanka to investigate attack on journalist

COLOMBO (AFP) — The France-based Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) Friday asked Sri Lanka to investigate an attack against a local journalist during a recent election campaign.

The RSF, in a letter to Sri Lanka's media minister

Mangala Samaraweera, said the house of local journalist M.W.

Samaraweera had been attacked on Jan. 28 after he wrote supporting the government's policy during the campaign.

Poll monitors have said

that while most of the election-related violence has been by the government, the opposition is to blame for a quarter of the cases.

"RSF asks you to ensure that those responsible for the attack are arrested and that they are severely punished if they attacked M.W. Samaraweera because of what

he wrote in his newspaper," the rights group said.

Independent poll monitors have reported that last month's provincial council election won by the ruling party was the most violent and fraudulent in Sri Lanka and asked for fresh elections.

Manila carries out 1st execution since 1976

MANILA (R) — The Philippines executed a convicted child rapist Friday, capping months of agonised debate in the mainly Roman Catholic nation on the resumption of capital punishment after a gap of more than two decades.

Leo Echegaray, a 38-year-old house painter, was pronounced dead at 3:19 p.m. (0719 GMT), eight minutes after he was injected with lethal chemicals, Justice Secretary Serafin Cuevas told reporters after witnessing the execution.

Church bells pealed across the city at the time of the execution in what priests said was a prayer for his soul and disapproval of capital punishment.

Echegaray's wife, Zenaida Javier, also among those watching the execution through a one-way mirror, screamed after her husband was declared dead and left the room sobbing, witnesses said.

Cuevas said Echegaray's final words were: "Filipinos, forgive me for the sins they accuse me of. A Filipino killed by a fellow Filipino."

"I hoped to see a sign of repentence from Echegaray," Cuevas said. "It didn't show." Television reports had previously said he had asked for forgiveness from his victim.

Two hours before Echegaray's death the Supreme Court rejected a last appeal for a stay of execution, saying it found no merit in a petition alleging prison authorities had made unauthorized changes in the procedure for carrying out a death sentence.

President Joseph Estrada, who has led the move to bring back capital punishment as a deterrent to violent crime, said Echegaray's death would serve as a warning.

"Today's execution is proof of the government's determination to maintain law and order," he said in a

Elegant Kosovo talks site sharp contrast to Dayton

RAMBOUILLET, France (R) — Rambouillet castle, scene of the Kosovo peace talks opening Saturday, has as much in common with the 1995 Bosnia talks site in Dayton as French cuisine has with American fast food.

The chateau, a former royal hunting lodge dating back to 1375, is one of France's official presidential residences with all the elegance and luxury that go with that rare status.

Nestled in a park in rolling countryside 50 km southwest of Paris, it has 30 bedrooms to house representatives of the Serb and ethnic Albanian warring parties and mediators from the United States, the European Union and Russia.

Among the quarters' highlights are Marie-Antoinette's oak-panelled boudoir, the copper bathtub Napoleon used several times day and the tower chamber where Francois I died in 1547.

"This is the opposite of Dayton," one chateau staffer proudly declared. "Comfort is our motto." Whether they will have much time to enjoy the switch from the killing and hatred in Kosovo remains to be seen.

"Anyone who has seen what has gone on in Kosovo for the last 10 years could not but think that they need to get up in the morning and work as hard as they can until they literally collapse at night," the U.S. envoy Chris Hill said in Pristina, capital of

the majority Albanian province of Kosovo this week.

The Bosnia talks turned Wright-Patterson Air Force Base airbase, a huge military complex in Dayton, Ohio, into the improbable focus of the Balkan drama for three weeks in 1995.

Negotiations were held in the 266-room Hope Hotel, a no-nonsense inn on the Midwestern base with cleanly functional conference rooms bearing names like "B-29 Super Fortress Room." The participants lived in brick dormitory-style buildings, each room identical right down to the cable television sets.

Searching for just the right word to describe it, one U.S.

official finally termed the lodgings "non-descript." There were no Michelin stars for the fast food served up at Packy's sports bar, but there wasn't much time for it anyway as delegates ate on the run between endless negotiating sessions.

By contrast, Rambouillet castle, which looks out over woods and canals where swans paddle silently, is a jewel placed along an ancient route between Versailles and Chartres.

Conference halls include the Council of Ministers Room, graced by 18th century red-and-gold Gobelins tapestries, and another gallery lined with red and grey Languedoc marble.

Mandela lauds past, looks to future

CAPE TOWN (R) — South African President Nelson Mandela gave his last state of the nation speech to parliament Friday, praising the work of the first all-race government and calling for national unity in elections targeted for May.

In a broad ranging speech prepared for delivery the 80-year-old political prisoner turned statesman announced the government's aim of holding elections between May 18 and 27.

But making the speech he skipped the relevant paragraph.

A government official said it had been cut on the advice of lawyers because of a court challenge by the opposition New National Party (NNP) to the electoral registration process, and the president's office said those remained the target dates.

Mandela steps down after the elections that his African National Congress is expected to win comfortably, and hands over to his deputy Thabo Mbeki.

Opposition leaders attacked the speech as weak and having many glaring omissions.

"It was very defensive of government's record. He basically admitted failure with regard to crime, job creation, education," NNP leader Martin van Schalkwyk said.

"He didn't say anything about the government's real lack of achievement. Since they have been in power 500,000 jobs have been lost and only last year 20,000 South Africans have been murdered," Democratic Party leader Tony Leon said.

In his 90-minute speech to a packed house, Mandela said huge strides had been made by his government since it swept to power in 1994 on a tidal wave of national euphoria, but that much remained to be done to right the legacy of apartheid.

"The long walk is not yet over," he said. "The prize of a better life has yet to be won." On the positive side he highlighted the successes in bringing water, electricity and telephones to millions of people who had been denied under apartheid.

"Every day on average since our democratic elections has meant another 1,300 homes electrified; another 750 telephones installed; and another 1,700 people gaining access to clean water," Mandela said.

But he accepted the government had fallen short of its target of building one million new homes and still had a huge problem with crime and corruption.

Without citing names, he launched a scathing attack on those responsible for a series of bombings and shootings around Cape Town in the past year.

"What started off... as a campaign against gangsterism has now become a violent and murderous offensive against ordinary citizens and law enforcement agencies," he said.

"I want to assure the people of Cape Town that we know who these people are; we know who trains and backs them; and steadily we are building water-tight cases against them."

Police have blamed militant Muslim group People Against Gangsterism and Drugs for the wave of attacks, including on tourist spots and police stations, but have so far failed to

secure a single conviction.

On the economic front, Mandela said his country had sound economic fundamentals and would maintain budgetary discipline.

But in a direct warning to the trade union alliance partners he said labour policy would have to be kept under review to make sure that South Africa did not find itself falling behind in the global challenge of competition.

Corruption, he said, had to be rooted out at all levels and the nation should pull together to ensure the peace that had been already established would never again be threatened.

"We slaughter each other in our words and attitudes. We slaughter one another and our country by the manner in which we exaggerate its weaknesses to the wider world. This must come to an end," Mandela said.

"We hope though, especially as we go into the election campaign, that real leaders will emerge who base their messages on hope rather than fear; on the optimism of hard work rather than the pessimism of armchair whining," he added.

troop contributors.

A total of five brigades, one of which will be comprised of reservists, will make up the peacekeeping force, according to French Defense Minister Alain Richard.

The 1,800-strong NATO extraction force based in nearby Macedonia will serve as the "core" of the Kosovo force as it can be quickly dispatched to the province pending the formal signing of a peace agreement, Richard said.

Britain, France and Germany are also expected to expand their air surveillance operations over Kosovo and Bosnia to provide protection for the troops on the ground.

Under an international plan, Serb officials and separatist representatives will have two weeks to thrash out a peace deal that would grant autonomy to the majority ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo.

In 1975, President Valery Giscard d'Estaing hosted a summit fireside chat about the world economy which evolved into the annual meetings of the Group of Eight — the U.S., Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Canada and Russia.

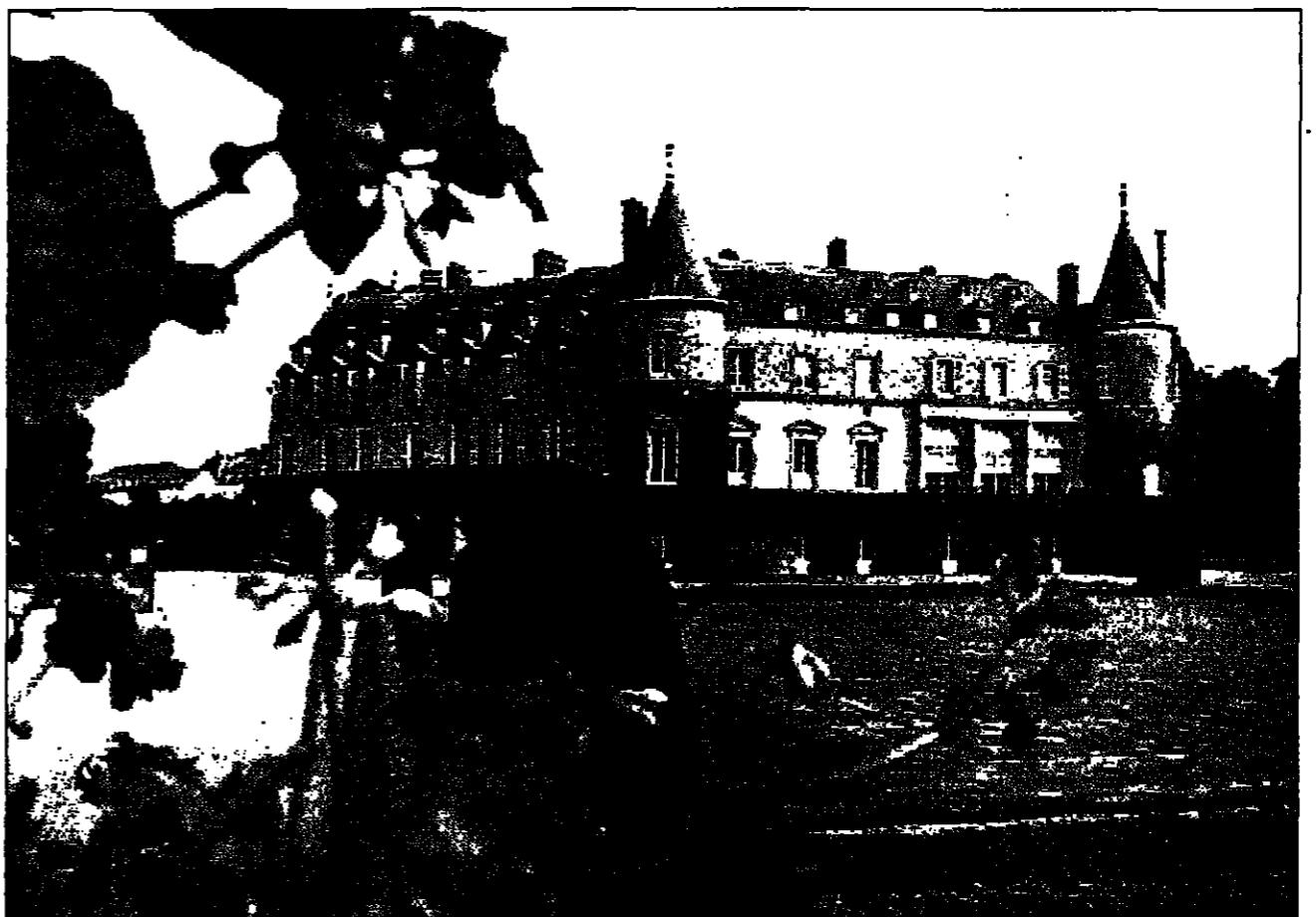
Although the chateau

has its own extensive wine cellar, the cuisine will be handled exclusively by

President Jacques Chirac's Elysée Palace in Paris.

Chefs, servers, wine and

food will all be moved to the chateau from Paris to ensure the best service France can provide during the talks, chateau staff say.



Picture dated Oct. 1975 showing the 14th century Rambouillet castle, an official residence of French presidents near Paris and the venue for the first summit of the Group of Seven major industrial powers in November 1975. The Kosovo peace conference, to open here Feb. 6, will combine direct talks and mediation by a trio of diplomats, with the foreign ministers of six countries on hand to intervene in case the talks hit deadlock (AFP photo)

Opinion & Analysis

Jordan Times, Saturday, February 6, 1999

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Elia Nasrallah

Editorial and Advertising offices
Jordan Press Foundation
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman
Telephones: 5684311, 5699634, 5667171, 5603585

Faxsimile: 5696183

E-mail: jotimes@go.com.jo

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Carrying the torch

JORDANIANS SPENT yesterday and last night glued to their television screens switching from one TV station to another to hear news about their beloved King Hussein. Many braved the cold weather conditions and lined up at the gates of Al Hussein Medical Centre offering prayers for the King and country. Meanwhile news agencies, world television stations, and journalists from over the world descended on Amman to relay news about the King's health. Journalists as far as Latin America were calling their colleagues in Amman for updates on the King's health and insights about the country's future.

Jordanians of course have genuine reasons to be concerned. Only two weeks ago they were out in the streets in the hundreds of thousands to celebrate the King's homecoming after he returned home from six months of treatment for cancer. Only one week after that they saw him board his plane once more and head back to the Mayo Clinic, suffering a relapse of cancer. And then yesterday they saw glimpses of the ambulance that carried him from the Queen Alia Airport to Al Hussein Medical Centre. Jordanians trust His Majesty's choice of HRH Prince Abdullah as heir to the Throne. They put trust in the King's decision to ensure their security and prosperity as they have on so many occasions in the past. But Jordanians, who grew up with the King and who have known no other leader, are also very saddened that a life's journey is about to end.

Meanwhile the interest that the world media has shown in the King and Jordan is a reflection of the stature the King achieved for himself as an active player on the Middle East scene. Not only is he the longest serving leader in the region, the King, and Jordan, have played a crucial role at all junctures in this region starting from the moment he assumed his powers in 1952. Thus it is no wonder that the most frequently asked question put by foreign journalists has been what will Jordan look like after King Hussein.

The answer they heard from Jordanians of all walks of life is that Jordan will continue to be the stable country it has been and that they will all be working to carry the torch that His Majesty has been carrying for the past 47 years.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Khairallah Khairallah said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon sent envoys to the U.S. in order to thwart Palestinian National Authority President Yasser Arafat's efforts there. "Bibi" did not hesitate to instigate religious fundamentalist groups to announce their boycott of the breakfast, which was attended by President Bill Clinton and Arafat, said Khairallah. With clear and effective Jordanian support, including efforts to establish agreements between Israel and the PNA, the Palestinian success is now obvious in the U.S. The importance of Arafat's attendance at the breakfast is that the ceremony included Clinton himself and 3500 American and international personalities. In other words, said the writer, the Palestinian people's representative has become acceptable to the U.S. institutions, which, in the end, dominate the country. Khairallah hoped that some Palestinian groups, which, he said, might serve Israel's Likud, did not exist at this stage.

Al Dustour's Ali Safadi said the last thing that the government should discuss is the two-day holiday as there are many important issues that concern citizens. If the government considers that the subject comes under administrative reform, it should not be a priority in this regard, added Safadi. Developing and activating administrative legislation and structure and ridding them of corruption in order to achieve efficiency in harmony with the people and the leadership must be the government's top priority, he said. A comprehensive review of the national march requires the government to rush to solve unemployment, poverty, economic depression and other crisis, the writer stated.

U.S. half-baked plan could be disaster

Jordanian Perspective



Dr. Musa Keilani

THOUGH SADDAM HUSSEIN does not enjoy much popularity with his own Iraqi people, nor among Arab heads of states in the region adjacent to Iraq, the recent attempts to rally Arab help to topple him is bound to fail. It has become evident that the United States has a serious problem in dealing with the Middle East. It takes the Arabs for granted and where that is not possible, adopts scare tactics. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Well, this time around, it is not working. It will not work because the U.S. is trampling over Arab sensitivities. In addition, the U.S. seeks to create more fait accompli in the Gulf region that will clear the ground for whatever actions drafted by American strategists in any eventuality, and that includes replacing any Arab regime at will. Hence, Washington's determined campaign to secure the support of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and others in U.S. efforts to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

But Washington has run into resistance from the region. All the countries which Martin Indyk, Washington's pointman in the ongoing effort to oust Saddam, visited in the Gulf on his latest tour, indicated they oppose the use of force and are in no mood to

support the U.S.-led campaign. Such a position is definitely not a reflection of a great admiration or love for the Iraqi leader, who has indeed alienated them by addressing the masses and calling for their overthrow, but stems from the consequences of such a campaign plus an overriding compassion for the people of Iraq. The press rose to speak up against the campaign where government leaders sought to express their position in private. Either way, there can be no mistake in recognising the message: Yes, the countries of the region can do without Saddam in power in Baghdad, but they do not want the U.S. to do the honours. All changes in Baghdad should be, as King Hussein has often reaffirmed, initiated and carried out by the people of Iraq, not the U.S. military or any American proxy.

The U.S. argument that it would not be directly involved in the effort does not hold water. After all, it is no secret that Washington is sitting on \$97 million (why just that figure, why not \$100 million) dedicated to toppling Saddam. Rather a cheap operation, given that the U.S. collected about \$60 billion to end the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The U.S. has also identified the Iraqi opposition groups which are qualified to

receive chunks of the \$97 million. If financing groups to undertake certain action towards a predetermined outcome is not direct involvement, then what is?

By now, the world knows that none of the so-called Iraqi opposition groups, whether in London or Damascus or Saudi Arabia or Tehran, is capable of bringing about real changes in Iraq. None of them has the credibility or clout needed to carry out the kind of changes that Iraq needs: nor can the groups come and act together with a positive vision for the future of their country. It is a safe conclusion that they will end up dividing up the \$97 million "bounty" and the U.S. will turn to the Arabs to produce more money for more efforts to topple Saddam.

Indeed, that is judgement and conjecture at this point, but it is based on the history of similar groups in general in the Arab World, and Iraqis in particular. In any case, that is neither here nor there, but one thing is clear: the U.S. is betting on the wrong horse to bring down Saddam.

But we in Jordan have a special reason to oppose the U.S. plan.

We know that any half-baked plan

— which is what it is — could seriously backfire, igniting more chaos in Iraq, and directly affect

its neighbours. And we Jordanians can do without having any additional burdens placed on us as a result of what might develop there between Sunnis and Shias.

There are several valid points and reasons behind the Gulf region's rejection of the U.S. drive to oust Saddam from power, and to install a "democratic government," as senior American diplomats have put it. First of all, allowing the U.S. a free hand to do whatever it wants in the region will open the door to high-handed American action against any country in the Gulf or elsewhere which does not see eye to eye with Washington in any future

eventuality. The statement from Oman that Sultan Qaboos told the U.S. team currently touring the region that Muscat is "opposed to any interference in the internal affairs of others, and is working to secure a lifting of the embargo and to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people" sums up the collective stand of the GCC. The U.S. team, headed by Martin Indyk, should also pick its cue from the fact that such a frank and forthright statement was not only made by the Omani leader, but carried by the official media. The net sum of the emerging picture is of a United States concerned more about the security and stability of the Gulf than the countries of the region. Washington is not only trying to tell the countries of the "dangerous" they face, it is also attempting to dictate the means with which they should confront it, never mind Arab pride and dignity. Adding insult to injury, the U.S. is declaring that it is determined to go ahead with its plans regardless of what the Arabs think and believe in. Then why come to the Arabs in the first place? To ensure that someone ends up paying the bill for American-conceived and American-implemented operations that does not serve Arab interests?

Strength in stability

Compiled by
Mohammad Ben Hussein

Columnists last week commented on His Majesty King Hussein's decision to change his successor.

THE STATE RUN Jordan news agency, Petra, quoted the Arab politician Abdul Hadi Abu Taleb in an article published in the London based newspaper, "The Middle East," commenting on King Hussein's decision to replace HRH Prince Hassan and appoint HRH Crown Prince Abdullah as heir to the Throne.

King Hussein created Jordan in its modern form, said Abu Taleb, and after great efforts and much pressure he was able to unify its people, who believe that his presence is the only guarantee of the country's stability and continuity.

The writer praised Prince Hassan for obeying the King and receiving his elder brother's order like a soldier, a however, who should not disappear; his country needs the experience he obtained during 34 years as crown prince.

AI ARAB AI Yawm's Abdul Rahim Malhas said Jordanians were worried by the King's decision to replace Prince Hassan by Crown Prince Abdullah because the decision was unexpected. For 34 years Jordanians were assured by the King's repeated statements that Prince Hassan was heir to the Throne, but suddenly, and for reasons still not clear, the King decided to appoint Prince Abdullah as his successor, said the writer. Jordanians are not worried about the succession to the Throne as much as they are worried about the King's health, said the writer and added that they are concerned about rearranging the Jordanian house not the Hashemite family.

Jordanians expect outside attempts to destabilise the country, but they believe that ultimately Jordan will win the battle because Jordan's future and stability concerns many influential countries, said Malhas. Jordanians are worried about the problems which may occur from within the Jordanian family not outside it, said the writer. They believe in "stability for continuity," but they are concerned about people who believe in "stability for investment," sacrificing their principles for the sake of money. However, the real worry is people who want to take an advantage from the stability of the country to continue to abuse people and "suck their blood," claimed Malhas. The writer argued that any change is accompanied by worry, but called it a great chance which could be used to defeat people who want to divide the country.

LETTERS

Prayers for His Majesty King Hussein

To the Editor:

WOULD YOU please convey to your readers the heartfelt sadness my wife and I felt tonight when we heard that King Hussein was gravely ill, and was rushed back to his country.

We were so impressed with his recent intervention in the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks in Washington. That was a rare example of personal and moral courage that transcended nationalities. We will pray to our God for your King. Our hearts go out to his wife, his family and his people.

Lawrence Connor
Missouri
U.S.

To the Editor:

I AM BRITISH living in Belgium. My prayers go out to His Majesty King Hussein, HM Queen Noor, the Royal Family and the people of Jordan.

Kenneth J. Heselwood
Belgium

To the Editor:

I JUST wanted to express my personal sorrow for the news of your beloved King Hussein's condition and to offer my prayers on behalf of the Royal Family, the Crown Prince Abdullah and the people of Jordan.

Marshall H. Massengale
Atlanta, Georgia
U.S.

To the Editor:

WE ALL pray for a miracle for your wonderful King truly a great person as well as a great king.

The Windsors
U.S.

To the Editor:

I AM sitting here at 1:30 am Friday, February 5, 1999 praying fervently for His Majesty King Hussein and his family. He is the greatest man I have ever met in my entire life. My heart bleeds for those who have been touched by his life, but especially for Abir, HRH Princess Haya and HRH Prince Ali — the children I was honoured to care for from September 1977 through May of 1980. I send my love to you and my prayers for your broken hearts this day. I await news of His Majesty's condition, yet I'm left wondering. My memories of my days in Amman are some of the most precious days of my life. His Majesty treated me as one of the family. He taught me so much — tolerance, kindness, respect for all human beings. He taught me how to see the world from his eyes, and how to humble myself to such a world. He honoured me with his trust to care for his sweet children who I think of and miss daily. May God be with you all in this time of great sorrow, and may He hold you close to give you strength to face the coming days.

My Sincerest Love and Sympathy,
Gayle M. Van Alstyne (Basaraba)

PLEASE ACCEPT the warmest thoughts and prayers of an ordinary American citizen for a speedy recovery for your leader, King Hussein. I hold King Hussein in the highest regard, as I believe many Americans do, and I believe that history will recognise him as one of the truly great men of the 20th century. While we may belong to different cultures and be products of different heritages, I feel that all of us have benefited greatly by the gift of his life and career. I sincerely hope that all men of good conscience will study his life and strive to follow his example for many years to come. While I am sure I cannot feel the depths of your grief at this time, I do share much of your sadness over his grave condition. It is a sign of his greatness, I believe, that we realise how much we will miss him.

William Wilson
U.S.

To the Editor:

IT IS with deep grief that I hear about King Hussein's failing health. He is a very warm and likeable person. My deepest sympathies goes out to his family, and if it may cast a ray of hope, my father survived a similar illness.

Lennart Andresen
Julius Bloms gate 10
2200 Copenhagen N
Denmark

To the Editor:

AS A RESIDENT of Rochester, Minnesota, I wanted to pass along my deepest sympathy to the Hussein family and indeed the country of Jordan. Please know that we too love your King and greatly enjoyed his presence in our home. He is, was, and always will be known as a great leader, a great statesman, and a great husband and father. We viewed him as a man who dearly loved peace. My deepest thanks to Jordan for sharing some of their light with me and my family. May God's face shine down upon him.

Jeff Swertfeger
Rochester
U.S.

To the Editor:

I WISH to express my concerns over the health of Your Majesty, King Hussein, and to let you know that we here in the United States of America, are praying for him.

We hope the pain and suffering he has endured will be reduced, and that the people will pause to their creator, and ask for strength in prayers for the King.

Gary Walters
Buffalo, New York
U.S.

To the Editor:

I HEARD on the news that your great and honourable King is coming home to live his last days with the ones he loves. I wanted to have a way of letting him know that I have always thought of him as a great and loving leader amongst a world of "not so greats." I have listened to his saneness and reasonableness since my teenage years and have felt great respect. He should be proud of what he has accomplished and hold his head high when he meets his God. He will be blessed and accepted and will sit alongside the greats of all time; Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, and others.

Terry Harosky
U.S.

To the Editor:

I OFFER my deepest sympathy and prayers for His Majesty King Hussein. At 44 years of age I have always followed King Hussein with great interest and admiration. My prayers are with his family and the wonderful people of Jordan.

Mark N Kilborn
Mobile, Alabama
U.S.

To the Editor:

I HAVE been reading news flashes on the precarious condition of King Hussein, and I wish to express my deep regret at his present medical condition. I am not a history expert by any means, but any American of adult age must know from the media coverage over the years of the importance on the world political scene of this man. He always seemed to play a very judicious, balancing role in your region, being a person of great intelligence, wisdom, personal character, and strength. The world will rarely find the like of him again.

Daniel Scott Smith
PO Box 457
St. Peters, PA 19470
websmith@bellatlantic.net

Features

Children of Iran's revolution want freedom and work

By Kaveh Basmenji
Reuters

THEY TOPPLED Iran's last monarch, they seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran, but 20 years on, the children of the Islamic revolution are demanding reforms from the moderate president they elected.

In a Tehran amusement hall run by a state-affiliated foundation, youths swarm around screens to play the latest U.S. and Japanese computer games. Outside, workers are erecting arches decked with green leaves and colourful lights for 10 days of celebrations marking the February 11, 1979, revolution.

"We read about the shah and the revolution in our school books, but we have other things on our minds. We want to be left alone and to have fun. Is that too much to ask?" asks Mandana, an 18-year-old girl, queuing at a Tehran cinema.

The demands of the young generation, not born when the revolution toppled the pro-Western Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, are cause for major

concern for the custodians of a system heralded by the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini under the slogan of "independence, freedom, Islamic republic."

More than half of Iran's 60 million people are under 25, including 24 million at schools and universities.

At a time of economic hardship and political uncertainty, many of the young people raise demands for education, social freedom, jobs, housing and easy marriage.

"The Islamic republic is trying to harness a tremendous energy. The youth cannot remember anything about the shah and do not care about the old days, but they carry the heritage of unfulfilled dreams of previous generations," said Mohammad Qaed, publisher of the educational monthly Loh.

Disillusioned with the policies of the conservative clerical establishment, the youth played a vital role in the 1997 election victory of Mohammad Khatami, who promised to attend to their needs. And they have so far supported Khatami despite his limited

powers in carrying out his reforms.

The sheer numbers of young people and strict social restrictions imposed on them pose a serious problem for any establishment, said social scientist Abbas Mokhber.

"If a fundamental solution is not found for their needs, the society could be seriously disrupted," Mokhber said.

Khatami has said repeatedly that it is essential to relax restrictions on Iranian youth if they are to be attracted to religion and safeguard the Islamic republic.

"The youth are standing firm on their votes and have not turned their back on Khatami despite economic problems. But to what extent? That remains to be seen," Qaed said.

Iranian youngsters are caught in the crossfire between traditionalism and globalisation, social scientists say.

Official education and state media try to keep them in line with revolutionary values in the face of a Western "cultural invasion" which is transforming their lives.

Students are called on to join the

Basij, a paramilitary organisation under the umbrella of the Revolutionary Guards, which aims to safeguard the revolution against "enemies."

"We will continue the path of our Imam (Khomeini). We will not let the West's cultural onslaught take over and dilute our Islamic principles," said Amir Hossein, a 16-year-old Basij member.

But many young people enjoy easy, albeit illegal, access to pirate videos of Hollywood's latest productions, tapes of pop and rock music and Western satellite television.

Boys and girls who ardently follow and try to emulate heavy metal or rap music groups now stroll together in the capital's shopping malls or parks. Under Khatami, they are less afraid of being arrested for flouting the ban on the contact between unmarried couples or the Islamic dress code for women.

Many of the "modern" youngsters also take active part in traditional religious rituals such as the Ashura processions commemorating the martyred Shi'ite Imam Hussein.

sand people.

The authorities have warned against the danger of drugs among the youth, and the state television continually broadcasts anti-drugs clips, soap operas and panel discussions.

Officials put the number of drug addicts at 1.2 million, but an anti-AIDS campaign group said recently the actual number was closer to 3.6 million, including 250,000 schoolchildren.

Unemployment, particularly among the educated, is a major cause of worry for the young. The official unemployment rate is 11 per cent, but analysts say it is actually much higher.

"Today virtually everyone can enter universities, but there are not enough jobs for graduates," Qaed said.

Analysts say the only solution to the multi-dimensional problem of Iranian youth is a democratic approach.

"Taking them into account and asking for their help, lifting unnecessary restrictions and make them feel like they belong to this country and not treat them as strangers, because the future is theirs," Mokhber said.

Beirut shops flaunt pirated software

By Nayla Razzouk
Agence France Presse

THE WORST thing about the unabated widespread use of pirated computer software in Lebanon is that people do not realise that they are doing something wrong.

Legally speaking, they may not be. Until long-awaited new anti-piracy legislation is enacted, up to \$40,000 pirated software disks will continue to be shipped to Lebanon from the Far East and Eastern Europe every month without breaking Lebanese copyright law.

Legal experts here say that the 1924 law is "very vague" making it impossible to take legal action against software pirates in Lebanon, where about 95 per cent of all software is thought to be copied.

Pirate versions of software programmes, whose originals cost anything from \$400 to \$4,000, are shamelessly on display at computer retail outlets on every Beirut street corner at a price of less than \$10.

Computer engineers also buy cheap computer parts from Asian countries enabling them to sell locally-assembled computers equipped with a wide range of unlicensed free software at the bargain-basement price of \$1,000.

"Such a set-up would cost about 4,000 dollars elsewhere. Lebanon is a paradise of pirated software, as nearly every home, company, bank and government institution is using unlicensed products," said a visiting foreign com-

puter expert.

"But what hurts the industry most is that nobody feels guilty. People don't know that they are doing something wrong," said Ziad Mughrabi, owner of one of the leading Lebanese Internet providers, Destination.

"One woman even had the nerve to complain that she wanted a cheaper version of a programme — which should cost 900 dollars — when she was asked for 15!" said a computer software dealer.

Disgruntled members of the information technology community are eagerly waiting for parliament to pass an amendment to the outdated copyright law that would finally give it some teeth.

The new bill is expected to stipulate jail sentences of between one month and three years and fines of between 500,000 Lebanese pounds (\$333) and 50 million Lebanese pounds (\$33,333) for software piracy, an official at the ministry of economy said.

The draft law was approved in November by the joint parliamentary commissions after three years of deliberation and many hope it will finally be ratified by parliament in its February session.

So far the only visible lobbying efforts for software protection have come from the United States, through its embassy, visiting officials and computer companies — mainly Microsoft.

"The embassy continues to lobby senior Lebanese government officials on behalf of U.S. companies who

report piracy and infringement, and has coordinated with the Lebanese government and Washington to allow U.S. experts to provide input on the new legislation," said a U.S. embassy report.

"If Lebanon eventually joins the World Trade Organisation, as it plans, it will have to (adopt) effective legislation and enforcement of intellectual property rights protections," said the report published on the Internet.

But reports about the new law have raised fears that computer use in Lebanon will decline, leading to unemployment, and encouraging the establishment of local pirate factories which would deal a blow to a fast-growing new local software development industry.

Many newspapers and even MPs have also warned that drastic measures against software piracy will provoke a "scientific and cultural catastrophe" which will mainly hit the younger generation in Lebanon where the minimum monthly salary remains \$200.

"We know that clamping down on piracy would be beneficial for Lebanon's reputation and the inflow of foreign investment but ironically it was piracy which helped develop the computer industry in Lebanon in the first place," said an expert.

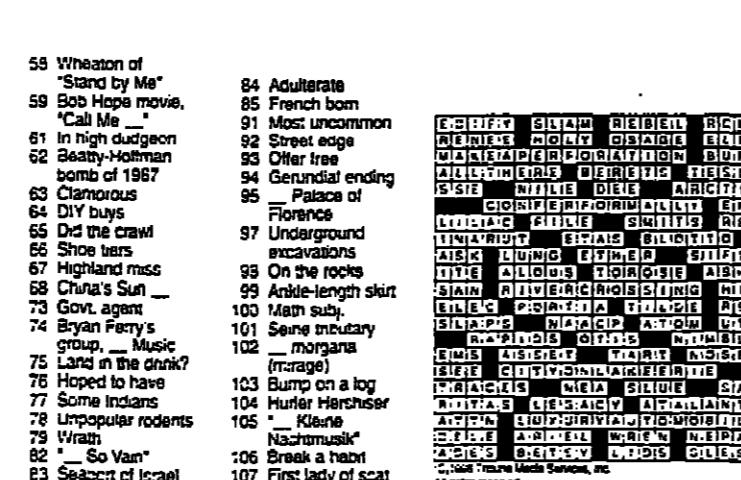
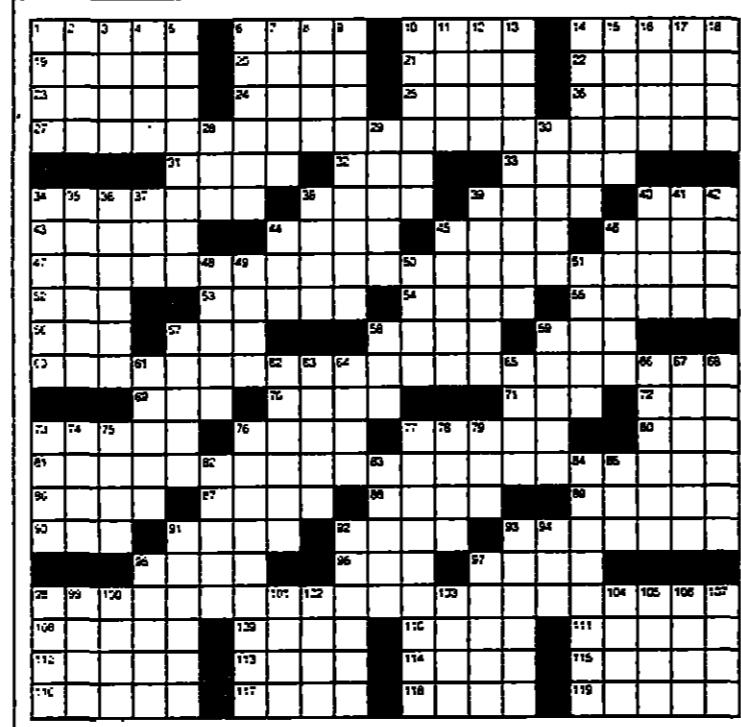
The irony of the situation is best summed up by a poster at the entrance of one of the largest stores on busy Hamra street proudly selling more than 100,000 pirated programmes, which warned: "It is not just wrong to use unauthorised software, it's a crime."

The Saturday Crossword**INTERVIEW WITH A SHEPHERD**

By Frances Hansen, Metuchen, New Jersey

ACROSS

- 1 Fox Cross Suburb
- 6 Bear tracks
- 12 Queen's address
- 13 Eulogy
- 19 Sanger's poison
- 20 Supermarket cash
- 21 "A Passage to ..."
- 22 "For the Birds?"
- 23 "Star Wars" princess
- 25 Hand Set
- 26 Substance
- 28 Do more sheep behave well?
- 31 Dispatches
- 32 Tenth of DIX
- 33 Police station
- 34 "Cats" up
- 35 Art out
- 39 Top off corn
- 42 Explosive sound
- 43 31-syllable poem
- 44 Too-dumb
- 45 Where Anna met
- 46 Long
- 47 Casuarina
- 48 Why are young sheep never
- 49 Sheep
- 50 Puzzlers
- 52 Coach car
- 53 Violent conflicts
- 55 Vamp—name
- 56 Skies
- 57 Transportation company
- 58 Greek Cross
- 59 Now, it's cold!
- 60 Very alert sheep
- 61 Inching
- 63 Color
- 64 Make dry
- 65 Lightly pale
- 67 Matress org
- 73 Kicked novel, with
- 76 Small amount
- 78 King or Boni
- 79 Chaps, hrs.
- 80 I'm going to sleep
- 85 Eat in a car
- 87 Action starter
- 88 First of the pet
- 89 Speedy
- 90 James Louis
- 91 Groom's ceremonial
- 92 Performers
- 93 Engagements
- 94 "I'm Afraid"
- 95 Outfit
- 96 Cut corners

**Iraq's ex-PoWs struggle to rebuild their lives**

By Tanya Willmer

Agence France Presse

KHADUM FADEL says he was reborn the day he crossed the border back into Iraq, painfully thin and trembling after 16 long years in a prison camp in northern Iran.

"I cannot describe the feelings. It's as if I had died and was given another life," said Fadel, whose shock of silver-grey hair makes him look much older than his 42 years.

"It was like a dream. Every year they told us you will return to Iraq, the next year it was the same story. For years we waited for our freedom, to see our families again."

He was among almost 5,600 Iraqi prisoners who returned home in an exchange with Iranian authorities in April — almost 10 years after the ceasefire ended the bloody conflict between the two neighbours.

Fadel, a reservist who went to war as a driver, struggled to remember fragmented details of his ordeal.

"It was a terrible time, miserable... little food, and often very cold. Sometimes we were chained up. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire and mines."

His return was traumatic and confused. He was underfed, suffering rheumatism and a stomach inflammation, and Baghdad had changed so much since 1982 that at first he didn't recognise his own neighbourhood.

But five months ago, Fadel married Suad, who had waited 16 years for her fiancé's return.

A mechanic by trade, he has also since returned to the ramshackle Baghdad car repair yard where he used to work.

Nowadays he does little more than tinker, as he tries to survive on the

130,000 dinars (\$70) the government paid him as his army salary for 16 years.

More than 90,000 Iraqi and Iranian PoWs have been repatriated since the end of the 1980-1988 war, but the issue remains a key stumbling block between the two, with both sides arguing over the number of its still captive.

Baghdad says 20,000 Iraqi PoWs are in Iranian jails, while Iran claims at least 5,000 of its soldiers are still in Iraq.

"It's the forgotten conflict," rued Daniel Duvillard, deputy head of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which supervises the repatriation process and occasionally acts as mediator.

"It's very long process, but even if it's a few hundred at a time it's a positive step," he said, adding that for many returnees another ordeal was only just beginning: to rebuild their lives in their sanctions-hit country.

Iraq has a grandiose memorial to the war which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives on both sides: an esplanade straddled at each end by soaring arches made of swords gripped by the hands of Saddam Hussein, and iron nets containing thousands of battered and bullet-scarred Iranian helmets.

Iranian helmets are also implanted into the road "so everyone must walk over them or drive over them," said a soldier on duty at the site.

Khalad Al Saadi, chairman of Iraq's parliamentary human rights committee, said repatriation of war veterans and their welfare was a key concern of the government.

A mechanic by trade, he has also since returned to the ramshackle Baghdad car repair yard where he used to work.

Nowadays he does little more than tinker, as he tries to survive on the

much aid was handed out.

The last handover of Iraqi PoWs was on December 16, with around 200 Iraqis returning just as U.S. and British forces launched their four-day Desert Fox air war on the country.

Satar Jaber, who served as a regular soldier, also has the date of his release etched on his memory. "I was born anew on August 24, 1990. That was the date of my return to Iraq and now it's my birthday."

The 40-year-old, bell captain at Baghdad's Sagman Hotel, was released in the first major prisoner exchange since the war, after being held captive for eight years in a tent camp in a mountainous region of northeast Iran.

"We ate only a little, some rice, no meat, and a small piece of bread, that was all for a day. We had no shoes and in the winter it was freezing. The snow was more than a metre (three feet) deep, enough to cover half a man, and we tried to make paths digging out the snow with our plates," he said.

"When they punished me, I pretended it was a gift, a medal, that's how I got through it. And even after all that time, I always knew we would return, but we had no news of the outside, no radio and we didn't even know when the war was over."

But Jaber said life under sanctions was little better. "The Iranians put a sort of blockade on us, gave their 40,000 Iraqi prisoners a little to eat, some clothes, some medicine," he said.

"Now I see the same blockade but from the direction of the United States and Britain, and this time it's not just against me, but all the people are suffering here, especially children."

New Iranian designers struggle to keep up with European fashion

By Mehrdad Balali

Agence France Presse

BEHIND AN austere facade tucked away in a garden in Tehran's northern suburbs, two young designers try to keep up with the latest European trends for a growing clientele of wealthy and fashion-conscious Iranians.

Ironically, the new generation of talented fashion designers emerged after the 1979 Islamic revolution, when the authorities imposed a dress code for women and banned the import of luxury items, which they see as a symbol of upper class vanity.

The showroom where the two sisters show off their new winter collection is open only to female customers even though they offer ready-to-wear designs for men as well as women.

And the workshop behind where some 30 tailors turn out their designs is segregated by sex in accordance with Islamic morals.

But with the meagre means at their disposal, the two women endeavour to produce the most sophisticated haute couture.

In a country where sexy images of women are forbidden, the designers' only exposure to the international world of fashion is through magazines they sneak into the country on their return from foreign trips or secure on the black market here.

Some designers take greater risks and hook up to a European fashion channel through satellites, which are banned in the Islamic republic.

Admirably, most manage to keep up

said.

Parand's line of avant-garde ready-to-wear could be presented at any high chain store in London or Los Angeles. For her outer garments for public wearing, she may not feel free to indulge in extravagant decor, but she manages to apply the latest cut in fashion and make them keep their original allure.

The election in May 1997 of moderate President Mohammad Khatami has led to a more tolerant atmosphere, with the official media now openly discussing young people's infatuation with Western trends, although often disapprovingly. "Unfortunately, our young people have become a slave to Western fashion," Kar-Kar newspaper said recently. "They try to keep up with the latest trends at all costs."

But the paper acknowledged that "one cannot deny and suppress the desire for fashionable trends," and advised the authorities to seek instead to "channel their tastes according to traditional standards."

Shadi Parand, another young designer, says she is constantly challenged by the demand here for the latest Paris fashions. "Upper middle class Iranians have a more sophisticated taste for fashion than the middle classes in America or Europe," says Parand, who studied haute couture in Paris and worked for four years at a design room manufacturing firm in New York.

"Many teenagers born after the revolution have a better eye for European fashion than the previous generation," she acknowledged ruefully.

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Aqel says present banking structure in Jordan will not be able to face foreign competition

"THE (JORDANIAN) banking sector in its present structure will not be able to face foreign competition should it opens to the outside world because of the small size of the banking units operating in the Kingdom, their limited financial and human resources and their inability to spend large amounts on training and technology," said Mufleh Aqel, the regional manager at the Arab Bank headquarters in Amman.

In a paper he submitted to a workshop held in Amman recently about the effect of joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on the Jordanian banking sector, Aqel indicated that the "obligations which we can provide in this regard should be limited especially in the area of acquiring and managing financial institutions and the area of participating in other financial products."

"During transition periods, we should allow the entry of expertise that we lack and which can help in developing the local market," Aqel said, stressing that we should not be embarrassed from exceptions as many countries, including the United States and many European states, have took that step. He was quick to explain that he was not opposing the openness drive but rather advocating a comprehensive strategy to optimise the gains from financial openness.

Aqel proposed that such a strat-

egy could begin through adopting a formula to develop financial ties on the Arab level. "We can exchange the advantages without being obliged to provide them to countries outside the Arab fold," the senior banker said adding that that should be besides rearranging the internal Jordanian banking environment. In this regard, he mentioned forming bigger units, utilising more advanced technologies and more qualified management.

The Arab Bank's regional manager emphasised that the global drive towards liberalisation and economic integration is a comprehensive move that must be followed but with the least damage. However, he said, the coming openness will have many negative effects that will affect the economies of the developing nations which cannot compete with large and more capable economies of developed states.

Aqel saw the possibility of foreign institutions collecting local savings and investing them in their home countries where more attractive opportunities and less risks exist. Furthermore, the negative effects can be in the form of opening legal channels to suck local savings in favour of foreign investments and through influencing on the efficiency of the monetary policies followed as a result of the liberal climate that will be offered to financial institutions (Al Ra'i).

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You like to have things the minute you think of them, but part of your lesson right now is self-discipline. It's not terrible to have to wait for what you want. You might decide you don't really want it after all. Instead of buying the first thing you see, hold onto your money and keep shopping.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You may decide to let your partner carry the ball today. Looks like the other person will get farther than you will. You may be in unfamiliar territory and a little worried about the next move. Well, your caution is well advised. There are some peculiarities about your situation. Better let a person with more experience take the lead.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) There's some sort of breakdown or disappointment today and you're the one who has to deal with it. Even if somebody else is involved, you have to make the decision. Plenty of people are telling you what to do, but nobody knows your situation as well as you do. Listen to them, but make the final decision yourself.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) The confusion is starting to abate and you're becoming more focused. It'll soon be apparent what needs to be done, and you'll be able to make the decision effortlessly. As long as there's still effort involved, you know the time isn't quite right. If you have to wait until tomorrow, so be it. Better late than never, in this instance.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) Travel doesn't look like a great idea today. That might be frustrating initially, but you should warm up to the fact once you realise how much you can accomplish. Odds are you'll be feeling bold and brassy tonight. Again, your best place to get exuberant is in the privacy of your own home, with somebody you love — who can keep a secret.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) Study the situation today before you take action. Things are not as they appear to be. Dig around a little to get the whole story. You love sleuthing. You're very good at solving puzzles, too, today even more than usual. Just know that now your hunches are probably right on target, so follow through on them.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You're in for a bit of a hassle today. Don't get

pushed into a decision that's not right for you. Your wisest choice is to figure out what's going to work best for you and the ones you love, and do that no matter what other people want you to do. That's important, especially if your money is involved.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You might as well sleep in this morning. Later, you'll get kind of antsy. Your energy level will go up and it'll be hard for you to sit still. There are lots of chores and projects that you have in mind, and you'll be a dynamo, racing around, getting everything done. Have a great time while you're at it!

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) The earlier you get started on a trip this weekend, the better your chances of avoiding delays. The longer you hang around the house, the more reasons you'll come up with to stay there. Could be friends dropping in from far away. If you think that's likely to happen, check it out. Don't assume anything today.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) You could attend a social gathering today that would be good for your career. If you're going to be doing business with someone, it always helps to build a relationship first in a casual setting. If you want to create a relationship where there isn't one, ask for coaching. Today, learning could be an avenue to success for you.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) Continue to stretch yourself — mind, body, attitude — to take in more and more. You're in an expansive phase, so don't hold back. Get uninhibited, at least as much as possible within self-defined parameters. Maybe you could stretch those parameters, too. Do a little work on that this evening, with the help of a good friend.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) This would be a great weekend for you to run a marathon. You're full of energy, and you want to stretch your barriers, stretch your boundaries, stretch your mind, stretch your legs, stretch everything. You'll be way in front of the pack before you even know what happened. Watch where you're going, however. There are hurdles to jump over.

Birthstone of February:
Amethyst — Onyx

Partners sabotage shopping sprees, says survey

LONDON (AFP) — Bored husbands and fussy women are costing stores up to 25 per cent extra sales by sabotaging their partners' shopping expeditions, according to research out Friday.

Men employ favourite tricks to escape shopping altogether, and both sexes annoy each other constantly when they do make it out to the shops.

The survey by a retail group found that men complain about traffic or lack of parking to avoid going out, and sulk about missing sport on television or appear bored when they do eventually go.

Men also infuriate their partners — described as the driving force behind most shopping trips — by urging them to grab the first thing and rush to the till.

Women are liable to study every shape, size and colour before making their choice, and accuse men of wanting to buy the cheapest thing on offer.

But women annoy their

partners too, by asking questions such as:

"Does my bum (U.S. butt) look too big in this?" and then complaining about the answer, the survey found.

They often reach the head of the queue and then disappear, deciding they need something else.

Feminine wiles for curtailing a tour of men's shops were much more subtle, the research found.

Men said their partners would complain of tiredness, aching feet and "not being well," or pretend they were worried about the children or where the car was parked.

Both sexes agreed that they would spend as much as 25 per cent more in the shops than they intended if their partners offered more supportive advice.

The survey urged retailers to do more to lure reluctant shoppers, such as offering adult "creches" — "imaginative places where the disaffected partner can be parked happily while shopping goes on."

AFM FROM 99-01-30 TO 99-02-03
ACCESS 4646888

COMPANY	OPEN	CLOSE	CHANGE
	PRICE	PRICE	
BANKS			
ARAB Bk	213.000	215.000	+0.04%
NTL Bk	1.510	1.510	0.00%
LBK OF JO	1.180	1.280	+8.40%
MIDDLE EAST BK	1.020	0.970	-4.90%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.510	1.480	-3.31%
THE HOUSING BK	2.700	2.750	+1.85%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.850	1.880	+2.42%
JO. GULF BK	0.700	0.680	-2.86%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.680	1.680	-1.19%
UNION BK	1.050	1.000	-4.76%
JO. INVEST & FIN. BK	1.340	1.280	-3.73%
BET ELMAIL	0.690	0.700	+1.45%
PHILADELPHIA Bk	0.520	0.520	0.00%
BANKS INDEX			
	280.810	point =	+0.01%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.800	3.580	-0.56%
PHOSPHATE	2.050	2.350	+14.83%
ARAB POTASH	3.780	3.970	+5.28%
PETROLEUM REFINER	10.980	10.880	-0.85%
JO. TANNING	5.300	5.150	-2.83%
THE IND. COMB. & AGRI	1.050	1.080	+2.86%
ARAB PHARMACEUTI	2.980	3.150	+6.42%
CERAMIC IND.	1.170	1.240	+5.98%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.200	1.380	+10.83%
JO. PIPES	1.080	1.130	+5.63%
NTL STEEL	0.500	0.500	0.00%
DAR AL DAWA	5.250	5.450	+4.21%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLE	0.550	0.540	-1.82%
JO. STEEL	0.920	0.920	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINUM	1.300	1.850	+2.63%
CHLORINE	1.250	1.240	-0.80%
LIVESTOCK & POULTR	0.380	0.400	+2.56%
INTL IND	0.350	0.350	0.00%
PETRO - CHEMICAL	0.320	0.300	-6.25%
INDUSTRY INDEX			
	92.980	point =	+3.05%
PARALLEL			
ZEXPORT Bk (75)	0.900	0.910	+1.11%
JO. TRADING FACILITI	0.400	0.380	-5.25%
CENTRAL STORG	0.350	0.350	0.00%
UNION INVEST. CORP.	0.850	0.870	+2.82%
AL. SKBAL	0.800	0.850	+6.25%
ADVANCED PHAR	0.530	0.520	-1.89%
AL. SHARQ	1.000	1.000	0.00%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.400	0.400	0.00%
AL. DAWLIAH	0.580	0.580	+1.72%
ARAB INT'L TRADE	0.210	0.200	-4.76%
SPECIALIZED INVEST	0.850	0.850	-18.33%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.410	0.420	+2.44%
READY MIX CONCRET	0.850	0.800	-5.61%
CENTURY	1.200	1.130	-5.83%
NAMCO	0.240	0.240	0.00%
ELECTRICAL IND	0.350	0.350	0.00%
(Z) MIDDLE EAST PHAR	0.650	0.650	-4.76%
UNION TOBACCO	3.350	3.850	+14.93%
AL-RAZI	0.580	0.580	0.00%
UNITED ENG. IND	0.220	0.180	-13.60%
BETL CERAMIC	0.400	0.380	-5.00%
NTL POULTRY	0.550	0.530	-3.84%
NUTRI DAR	0.720	0.700	-2.78%
GRAND INDEX			
	172.18	point =	+151%

Mergers seen necessary for Lebanon bank growth

BEIRUT (R) — Merger fever is set to sweep Lebanon's financial sector as a sluggish economy and falling interest rates force banks to consider consolidation, bankers have said.

They said last month's takeover deal between two leading banks would give acquisitions an added edge in an industry criticised for having too many small banks and not enough institutions that can handle regional business.

"It's not much being the number one bank in Lebanon any more," said Bassam Yammine, senior manager of the corporate finance division at Lebanon Invest, referring to the merger between Byblos Bank and Banque Libanaise pour le Commerce (BLC).

"With the slowdown in the economy in Lebanon and in the world, banks need to go regional to survive and to do that, they must merge. They will also have to become much more efficient or much bigger to face up to the pressure that the treasury bill yields will have on their income," he told Reuters.

"This year we're going to see more mergers and acquisitions because no one wants to be left behind," said Salam Saade, senior associate at Middle East Capital Group.

"There's going to be war between the top banks. The battle has

already begun and the (BLC-Byblos) merger reinforces it," he added.

Byblos last month bought 53 per cent of BLC for \$109 million, creating the country's biggest bank in terms of capital.

The new institution, which will retain the Byblos name, has the largest number of branches in Lebanon. It also has four offices in the United Arab Emirates and representation in Paris, London and Brussels.

BLC's chief financial officer Jean Felix Aboujaoude described the merged entity as "the only real Lebanese institution with a regional potential." Financiers said it was the catalyst that would speed up much-needed consolidation.

"Lebanese banks are finding themselves in a position where bigger is better," said a senior financial analyst. "Small banks have to search for an ideal partner to grow and big banks are finding their growth not increasing at the same pace. Their ability to survive depends on mergers."

ASEAN travel slump costs estimated 2m jobs, \$7.5b

SINGAPORE (AFP) — South East Asian tourism ministers and travel executives met here Thursday to work out strategies against a slump which cost their economies an estimated two million jobs and \$7.5 billion in 1998.

Singapore Trade and Industry Minister Lee Yock Suan, citing figures from the World Travel and Tourism Council, told the ASEAN Tourism Conference the next two years would remain tough globally and regionally.

"In the face of intense competition from other regions for the tourism dollar, ASEAN countries must get their acts together, both individually and collectively, to attract a larger share of the global tourism revenue," he said.

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) groups Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore

Hingis advances to semifinals, Davenport eliminated

TOKYO (AP) — Australian Open champion Martina Hingis rebounded for a 3-6, 6-2, 6-4 victory over Steffi Graf of Germany Friday, advancing to the semifinals in the Toray Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament for women.

In the day's biggest upset, defending champion and top-seeded Lindsay Davenport of the United States lost to No. 7 seed Amanda Coetzer of South Africa 2-6, 6-4, 6-3.

With Davenport eliminated, the Swiss teenager now can get back to the top WTA rank if she beats third seed Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic Saturday to reach the final.

Davenport surged ahead of Hingis to the No. 1 rank last Oct. 12.

Novotna took the first set 7-5 over eighth-seeded Natasha Zvereva of Belarus, who then retired with eye problems.

In another match in the round of eight players, fourth seed Monica Seles of the United States defeated sixth-seeded Anna Kournikova of Russia 7-5, 6-3.

On Saturday, Seles meets Coetzer.

Second-seeded Hingis regained rhythm in the second set after an error-filled first set with three service breaks against one by Graf.

Graf, fifth-seeded, went ahead 3-1 in the final set but Hingis rebounded with some big serves, big ground shots and sharp shooting.

Graf had to take a three-minute medical time for cramps in the left thigh midway through the final 10th game in the third set, while Hingis drew a loud applause for juggling with three tennis balls.

"Next time I'll try to show the audience juggling with four or five balls," Hingis said. "I practiced it because we had a ... circus at school when I



Martina Hingis of Switzerland returns the ball during her quarter final match against Steffi Graf of Germany in the Toray Pan Pacific Open women's tennis tournament in Tokyo Feb. 5. Hingis defeated Graf 3-6, 6-2, 6-3 (AFP photo).

was nine or 10. I wasn't doing that show but everybody was doing something."

"When I was younger she was killing me all the time. I was 14 or 15 years old playing her, then No. 1 in the world. But this time I am a different player," Hingis said of her 2-6 career record against Graf.

Graf said she started getting cramps at 3-1 in the final set.

"At that time I knew it was very difficult to finish the match ... and I knew I could barely run any more," she said.

Davenport said she hoped the day's match was just a bump in the road.

"I just didn't play very smart and made a lot of errors and I didn't serve very well. And she definitely took advantage of that," Davenport said.

About the WTA ranking, the 22-year-old Davenport said, "You know I'm not playing like the No. 1 player in the world and I think Martina fully deserves it right now. I have to start playing a lot better."

In the doubles semifinals Saturday, Davenport and Zvereva play against Argentine Patricia Tarabini and her partner Caroline Vis of the Netherlands.

YONGPYONG, South Korea (AP) — China's Xue Ruihong and South Korea's Choi Jae-bong grabbed their second gold medals in the Winter Asian Games Friday by winning the women's and men's 1,000-metre speedskating races.

With one more day and one gold medal left, China was leading the medal count with 15 golds. South Korea was next with 11, trailed by Kazakhstan with nine and Japan with six.

On the sixth day of competition, China and Kazakhstan each raked in three golds. Japan collected two. Uzbekistan and South Korea each walked away with one.

Chinese Shen Xue and Zhao Hongbo grabbed the gold in the pairs figure skating competition. The Chinese pair of Wang Rui and Zhang Wei took China's third gold of the day when they won the ice dancing event.

In women's 1,000-metre speedskating, China's Xue, the winner of Wednesday's 500 metres, clocked in at 1 minute, 23.61 seconds, beating fellow Chinese Yang Chunyuan by 0.03 of a second.

Japan's Rina Seki won her first gold in women's downhill slalom skiing.

She finished the two runs down the 520-metre slope in a combined

China has taken three of four golds in women's speedskating.

Kazakhstan's Svetlana Shishkina won the women's 10-kilometre (6.2-mile) free-style cross-country race, beating Sumiko Yokoyama of Japan by 12.5 seconds.

Shishkina finished in 27:02.8, ahead of Yokoyama, who beat her in the 5-kilometre sprint Monday. The Kazaks have taken all but one of the six cross-country races.

The Kazaks also swept both the men's and women's four-by-7.5-kilometre biathlon relays.

The four-man squad of Alexey Karevskiy, Sergey Abdurakov, Dmitry Pantov and Dmitry Pozdnyakov finished the relay in a total time of 1:18:15.3, ahead of Japan and South Korea.

It's women's team of Galina Avravaya, Margarita Dulova, Yelena Dubok and Lyudmila Guryeva came in at 1:50:32.9, beating China and South Korea.

Japan's Rina Seki won her first gold in women's downhill slalom skiing. She finished the two runs down the 520-metre slope in a combined

1:47.57. Toshihito Itokawa gave Japan its second gold of the day in the men's 10-kilometre speedskating in 15:05.13.

South Korea's Choi won his second gold in as many days when he finished the men's 1,000 meters in 1:14:74. Choi also won the 1,500 metres Thursday.

Uzbekistan's Talyana Malinina gave her country's first gold medal when she beat Japanese Shizuka Arakawa and Fumie Suguri in the women's singles figure skating.

Meanwhile, in the eastern cost city of Kangnung, Mongolia's nascent ice hockey team beat Kuwait 5-4 to avoid the humiliating last place in men's ice hockey.

Mongolia had allowed 54 goals and scored only one in the two previous matches and had longed to dignify itself when it met with Kuwait, which had lost two earlier matches by a combined score of 79-1.

The Winter Asian Games ends Saturday with the men's ice hockey match between Kazakhstan and Japan.

Iranian star faces lengthy ban for referee assault

HO CHI MINH CITY (AP) — Iran's new star goalscorer Mohamad Ali Karimi faces a lengthy ban for his attack on a referee at the Dunhill Cup here.

Karimi, 21, was one of the heroes of Iran's Asian Games winning side in December and has attracted attention from European clubs.

But the Asian Football Confederation disciplinary committee will meet in Kuala Lumpur next Thursday to consider action after Karimi kicked and pushed Japanese referee Toru Kamikawa in a match against Vietnam on Tuesday.

Such an assault on a match official can lead to a ban of up to two years.

Karimi was sent off and suspended for the rest of the tournament. He has apologized to Kamikawa but can expect no mercy from the AFC.

If the confederation goes for the maximum penalty it will

take a convincing appeal by a contrite player and his apologetic national federation to get it reduced.

Karimi was one of two Iranians sent off in a tense two minutes midway through the match against the hosts.

Ali Ansari collected his second yellow card in the 69th minute for a tackle from behind. Iranian players immediately surrounded Kamikawa to protest the decision and Karimi pulled Kamikawa's shirt and kicked him in the shins.

A host of European scouts followed Karimi at the Asian Games in Bangkok. Ali Daei and Khodadad Azizi already

play in Germany.

But the Iranian federation told them that the attacking midfielder must stay in Iran for at least another year. Any move could now be even further away.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Sports leader visits oman

GENEVA (KUNA) — KUNA learnt today that FIFA president Sepp Blatter will visit the Sultanate of Oman Saturday to Monday. Blatter will attend in Muscat an international friendly match between Oman and Slovenia at the Sultan Qabus sports complex. He will also meet the personal representative of Sultan Qabus, the president and board of directors of the Oman Football Association, and the president of the General Organisation for Sports and Cultural Activities for Youth. Blatter is scheduled to hold a news conference during his visit to Muscat.

Chicago Bulls sign first ever Hungarian NBA player

BUDAPEST (AFP) — Basketball player Kornel David became the first Hungarian to join an NBA team on Thursday when he signed a two-year contract with the Chicago Bulls, winners of six championships in the past eight seasons. "Everything took place so fast. Two weeks ago I was playing in the Hungarian championship and now I have a contract with the world's most successful team," said David, who has been playing with the west Hungarian Szekesfehervar Albacomp-SZUV team. The 29-year-old David, who will play either guard or center with the number 18 shirt, will receive the minimum wage of the league, an annual \$270,000. The Bulls have had to heavily rebuild since coach Phil Jackson refused to return, while legendary player Michael Jordan retired and other championship winning players Scottie Pippen, Australian centre Luc Longley, Steve Kerr and the colourful and unpredictable Dennis Rodman jumped ship to other teams.

Wilkins looks for NBA comeback at 39

ORLANDO, Florida (AP) — Dominique Wilkins, trying to make a National Basketball Association comeback at the age of 39, will sign with the Orlando Magic by the end of the week it was reported on Thursday. The nine-time NBA All-star, who played last season in Italy, will make his return for the first time since 1997, when he averaged 18.2 points a game with San Antonio. Wilkins has 26,534 points in 14 NBA seasons, the eighth-highest scoring total in league history, and averaged 25.3 points a game. Wilkins averaged 30.3 points in 1986 to lead the NBA, making him the last man to win a scoring title in the league other than Michael Jordan in a season during which Jordan played a full campaign.

Prince Albert disillusioned with Monaco

MONACO (R) — Prince Albert, usually a regular at Monaco's home matches wearing his red and white scarf, is so disappointed with their form this season he has given up going to the Stade Louis II. "I've already warned (club president Mr Jean-Louis) Campora that I won't come back as long as the team can't string three wins together," the prince said in an interview published on Friday. "I'm not getting any pleasure watching my club play this season, even if they win." Prince Albert, an International Olympic Committee member, told L'Equipe in Lausanne where he was attending the world conference on doping in sport. The prince, whose father Prince Rainier is the club's main financial backer, criticised Campora and hinted there could be changes in the club leadership. "It's clear that this club is lacking leadership," Prince Albert said. "We don't have anyone in place with the necessary charisma." He also criticised the dreadful state of the Stade Louis II pitch which has been slammed by visiting and home players. Monaco, French champions in 1997 and European Cup semifinalists last year, have struggled this season. They are sixth in the first division, 16 points adrift of leaders Girondins Bordeaux, and out of both domestic cup competitions. Coach Jean Tigana resigned in mid-January as was replaced by his assistant Claude Puel.



Former soccer star Argentinian Diego Armando Maradona (C) is accompanied by police and surrounded by media as he arrives at Malpensa 2000 airport outside Milan, Feb. 4. Reportedly the former SSC Naples soccer star, arriving here on Thursday coming from Buenos Aires, is in Italy to be questioned in the doping affair (AFP photo).

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Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

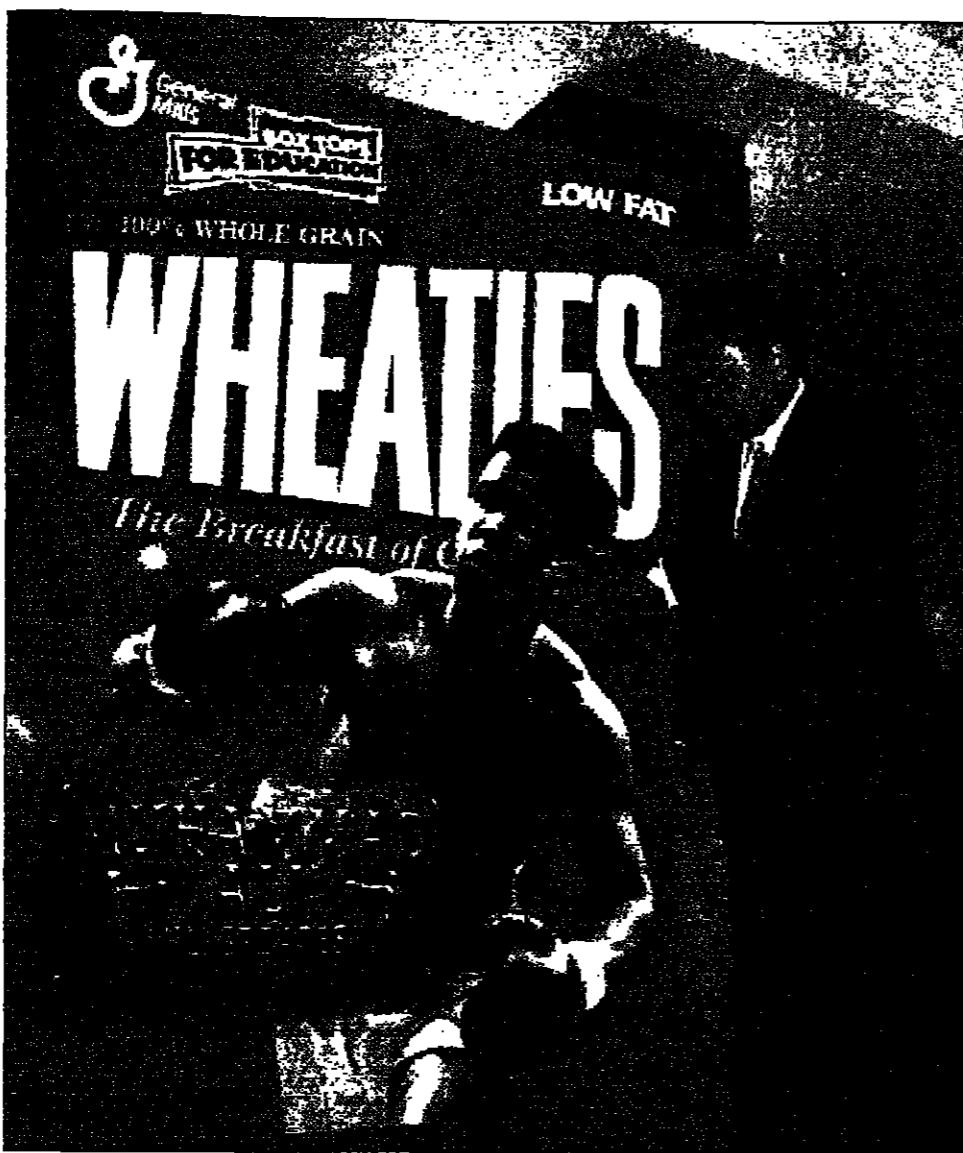
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LONDON (R) — Former European club ranking their 3-2 win over Salernitana. Milan, who jumped two places to Florence to play Serie B. Juventus are second in the League. Napoli are third. AC Milan are fourth. Juventus are fifth. Inter Milan are sixth. Roma are seventh. Lazio are eighth. Juventus are ninth. Milan are tenth. Juventus are eleventh. Inter Milan are twelfth. Roma are thirteenth. Lazio are fourteenth. Juventus are fifteenth. Inter Milan are sixteenth. Roma are seventeenth. Lazio are eighteenth. Juventus are nineteenth. Inter Milan are twentieth. Juventus are twenty-first. Inter Milan are twenty-second. Roma are twenty-third. Lazio are twenty-fourth. Juventus are twenty-fifth. Inter Milan are twenty-sixth. Roma are twenty-seventh. Lazio are twenty-eighth. Juventus are twenty-ninth. Inter Milan are thirty-first. Roma are thirty-second. Lazio are thirty-third. Juventus are thirty-fourth. Inter Milan are thirty-fifth. Roma are thirty-sixth. Lazio are thirty-seventh. 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Sports

Ali finally accepted by breakfast cereal



Muhammad Ali touches a younger version of himself which is on the special edition Muhammad Ali Wheaties' box that marks the cereal's 75th anniversary. Feb. 4. Wheaties, "The Breakfast of Champions," is honouring the man widely accepted as one of the greatest athletes of all time (AFP photo)

NEW YORK (R) — Wheaties finally became the Breakfast of Champions Thursday.

Many years after Muhammad Ali came to be revered around the world the people who sell the corn flakes decided it was politically and profitably correct to jump onto the fabled boxer's bandwagon and put his picture on their cereal box.

Ali joins a long list of American sports heroes — although the first African American was not until Walter Payton in 1986 — to be so prominently featured by the 75-year-old brand which bills itself as "The Breakfast of Champions."

The former three-time heavyweight champion has been dramatically slowed by Parkinson's disease and can only mumble his words.

But as he demonstrated Thursday at a news conference at Madison Square Garden — the site of some of his most memorable fights — the 57-year-old Ali still is able to project the renowned, often irreverent wit that annoyed, dazzled

and ultimately captivated people around the world.

Before that, however, he was reviled by many in America for his refusal to be drafted into military service for the Vietnam War. His explanation became legendary: "Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong."

For his refusal to be drafted, Ali had his boxing license suspended.

Ali was asked why he thought it took Wheaties so long to recognise him.

"The Vietnam War. We ended up admitting it was wrong and we shouldn't have been there ... all the talking 'I'm the greatest' and all the bragging and the style I had when I first started, that stopped," said Ali, adding to laughter, "I'm still pretty."

And then in vintage Ali, who once a long time ago had the quickest feet and fastest hands of anyone, slowly stooped, and like grandfathers everywhere overcome by a special desire, gently picked up first one and then another little girl and kissed her on the cheek.

Wheaties delay in recognising him: "At the height of his career in the 60s, he might have been a little too controversial ... (The Wheaties box) was an honour a long time coming."

After the curtain was dropped from a large picture of the Ali Wheaties box, Ali gently rubbed the photograph of his chin and dutifully posed for publicity shots with fists slowly churning at his side.

But the symbol of the Ali that especially in recent years has endeared himself to millions of people around the world came as he was leaving.

Clusters of children were heading toward the entrance to see the circus. They gathered around him as if he were a pied piper.

And the former fighter, who once a long time ago had the quickest feet and fastest hands of anyone, slowly stooped, and like grandfathers everywhere overcome by a special desire, gently picked up first one and then another little girl and kissed her on the cheek.

Ali's wife, Lonnie, said it more simply when answering for her husband about

WASHINGTON (AP) — Now, more than ever, National Basketball Association teams will rely on talent from beyond the United States to build championship clubs in a chaotic season.

Teams play 50 games in 90 days starting Friday after a labour dispute wiped out three months and 32 games and touched off an unprecedented wave of transfers and long-term contract deals.

Dutch center Rik Smits anchors favored Indiana. Jamaican-born Patrick Ewing mans the middle in New York. African-born centers Hakeem Olajuwon of Houston and Dikembe Mutombo of Atlanta make their teams contenders.

But a new set of centres will test the stars, led by Shaquille O'Neal, NBA Rookie of the Year Tim Duncan and Lithuanian Zydrunas Ilgauskas, who signed a six-year deal with Cleveland worth \$71 million.

"As the older guys move on, the Patricks and Olajuwons, you will choose from Tim Duncans and Shaquilles," Cleveland coach Mike Fratello said. "You have to look at the other guys up there and I think Ilgauskas has the potential to be an All-Star."

The rebuilding Chicago Bulls have signed Kornel David, the NBA's first Hungarian player, moved Canada's Bill Wennington to start at center and focused the team around Croatia's Toni Kukoc.

"Toni has stepped up as our go-

to guy," Bulls coach Tim Floyd said. "He will have to do a lot and we will give him the freedom to do it."

An Australian trio could have a major impact, with former Bulls center Luc Longley now in Phoenix, Chris Anstey manning the middle in Dallas and long-range sharpshooter Andrew Gaze joining San Antonio.

"Luc has looked quite good," Phoenix coach Danny Ainge said.

"He's not a player who does anything great. He does a lot of things good. He's a good passer, a good shooter, has a big body and experience."

"We're excited to have him. I don't want to put a lot of pressure on him. I don't think he is a superstar. He fills a role for us. Luc has played on some great teams and that has to rub off to some extent."

Gaze will join former Bulls guard Steve Kerr in providing an outside threat to go with San Antonio's inside powers, David Robinson and Duncan.

"He's one of the premier shooters in the world," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said. "This guy is a good enough player that he can jump right in. The (cut to) 50 games does hurt him as far as having a better shot to get into the main rotation."

"He hasn't had time to get used to the system, both ours and the NBA. It takes a little time. It's tough to make that big a jump that quickly."

Anstey surprised Don Nelson with his work ethic, literally forcing the Dallas coach to find him a pivotal role on the team.

"I have been very impressed at what Felipe has done so far, getting in our rotation," Grizzlies coach Doug Hill said. "He's very good off the dribble, attacking and getting to the free throw line."

He has had tremendous training camp.

"He is a very playable player. He's wiry, strong and very clever. He's a very bright guy and gifted athletically. I can't believe a guy who can do those world class things at 7 feet tall can't be a great player."

Canadian guard Steve Nash has also impressed the Mavericks' mentor.

"He's another player who is going to get a lot better but we think he is awfully good right now," Nelson said. "He's as good an all-around player as I have ever had at point guard."

But the top global star in Dallas is German Dirk Nowitzki. He averaged 13 points, six rebounds and three assists in two exhibition games.

"He's terrific. We're very excited about him," Nelson said. "He can do all the things you want him to do. He's awfully good right now. I would hate to see what he's going to be like in two or three years."

Vancouver has the NBA's top

Hispanic talents, Venezuelan Carl Herrera and Dominican rookie Felipe Lopez.

"I have been very impressed at what Felipe has done so far, getting in our rotation," Grizzlies coach Doug Hill said. "He's very good off the dribble, attacking and getting to the free throw line."

He has the attitude and work ethic, the talent and enthusiasm.

There's no reason down the road he can't be a starting guard in the NBA."

Long-suffering Sacramento has Yugoslavians Vlade Divac and Predrag Stojakovic, who averaged 15 points and five rebounds in two exhibitions.

"He has got a great feel for the game," Kings coach Rick Adelman said.

On Divac, Adelman added, "One of the big things he has brought to this young group is he's a leader. He's encouraging all the time."

I was surprised he would be that vocal. He's pushing the other guys to stay positive. He does adapt. He finds a way to make others more effective."

Nigerian-born Michael Olowokandi, the top pick in last year's NBA draft, joins a Los Angeles Clippers team that lost 65 times last season.

"He's a bright young man with a great upside," Clippers coach Chris Ford said. "He's ready. Some guys are playing themselves into shape."

Chaos helps NBA global group grow

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Salt Lake committee to reorganise in wake of scandal

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt and Salt Lake Organising Committee Chairman Robert Garff have unveiled a sweeping reorganisation plan for running the 2002 Winter Games that is more open and has better oversight.

The reorganisation announced Thursday would include 17 or 18 new spots on the SLOC board of trustees. The board's executive committee would be replaced with a new management group ordered to keep a tight rein on planning.

The proposal by Garff and Leavitt will be voted on next week by the full board. That vote will come two days after it gets a report from an independent ethics panel investigating Salt Lake City's bidding for the games to watch over staffers now blamed for excesses.

Leavitt declined to say whether restructuring of the board might mean ridng it of businessmen who were enlisted during Salt Lake's bidding for the games to watch over staffers now blamed for excesses.

The SLOC ethics committee investigating the scandal also has looked at contracts awarded by the SLOC board to some of its members. A \$23.2 million contract went to a construction company headed by board trustee Alan Layton to build a top for a speed skating oval. SLOC board member Earl Holding is owner of Snowbasin ski resort, where the downhill races will be staged.

The reorganisation is designed to broaden community representation and give more responsibility to the management committee. However, the enlarged board of trustees would lose its decision-making authority, playing only an advisory role for the management committee.

The 17 or 18 new board members, to be chosen by Leavitt and Mayor Deedee Corradini, likely would be ready to join the board on Feb. 11, Garff said. "We

have a reasonable expectation it will be approved," he said.

Garff and Leavitt declined to say whether board members who also were on the bid committee will remain on SLOC.

"We'll have to see if any of those people are implicated," Garff said. "We will review those facts and then take decisive action."

The roles of First Security Corp. Chairman Spence Eccles and PacificCorp Vice President Verl Topham, who are both on the current executive committee, have come under question. They were enlisted during Salt Lake's bidding for the games to watch over staffers now blamed for excesses.

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Knesset adopts budget after funds added for settlers, religious causes

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's parliament finally adopted a state budget for 1999 early Friday but only after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to more spending for Jewish settlements and religious causes.

After an all-night debate which often degenerated into shouting matches and insults between deputies of the governing coalition and the opposition, the budget was passed at dawn by a vote of 48 to 34 in the 120-member Knesset.

Netanyahu, who holds the finance portfolio since minister Yaakov Neeman resigned in December out of frustration with coalition bickering over the budget, had to agree to a series of demands from minor right-wing and religious parties to finally get the law passed.

In total Netanyahu agreed to additional spending of

551 million shekels (\$137 million) in a total budget of around 215 billion shekels (\$54 billion).

The last-minute changes involved promising an additional \$38 million to Jewish settlers in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights for settlement construction, tourism development projects and additional security.

The rest of the increase mainly concerned funding for religious education and other projects demanded by ultra-Orthodox groups and the ultra-nationalist National Religious Party.

A further \$2.5 million was promised for subsidised housing for new immigrants at the demand of the Russian immigrant party Israel B'Aliya.

But Netanyahu insisted he had limited the extra spending to levels traditionally doled out during budget debates in the multi-party

but would be financed out of reserves and that the government's target of limiting the budget deficit to two percent of gross domestic product would be respected. The deficit stood at 2.4 percent of GDP in 1998.

The last-minute spending increases agreed by Netanyahu fell far short of what the smaller parties in his unruly coalition had been demanding and which some estimates put as high as \$500 million.

Opposition Labour Party deputies charged that Netanyahu had made behind the scenes promises to some parties that would double the additional spending for their pet projects if he wins reelection in May.

Opinion polls show Netanyahu running neck-and-neck against his main challenger for the prime ministership, Labour Party leader Ehud Barak.



WOMEN ATTEND VIGIL FOR KING: Several women weep Friday under heavy rains outside Al Hussein Medical Centre in Amman, where His Majesty King Hussein is hospitalised (AFP photo)

Serbs reject talks with KLA, block rebel negotiators

PRISTINA (AP) — Serb authorities put weekend peace talks on Kosovo in jeopardy Friday, blocking ethnic Albanian rebels from leaving for France and later sending for them to negotiate with the guerrillas at all.

"We will never negotiate with the terrorists," Serb delegation chief Ratko Markovic told reporters in Paris.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the abrupt announcement meant the Serbs would boycott talks as proposed by world powers, but it underscored the huge negotiating obstacles even if all sides take part.

Five members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) were set to be a part of a larger ethnic Albanian delegation at talks scheduled to start at Rambouillet outside Paris on Saturday afternoon.

But the Kosovo Albanian delegation remained in Kosovo on Friday after an hours-long diplomatic stand-off, with Serb officials reportedly balking because two KLA members lacked passports.

Markovic's comments suggested the issue went beyond passports.

"We consider the so-called Kosova Liberation Army a terrorist organisation, and with killers and kidnappers we have nothing to talk about," Markovic said.

He said the Serbian delegation, which arrived in Paris Friday afternoon, was ready to negotiate only with ethnic Albanian politicians. But the Kosovo Albanians signalled earlier that they are certain not to agree to such a move.

In a rare show of solidarity, political figures who have long been at odds with the guerrillas refused to leave Kosovo without their fellow negotiators.

The United States and its five European allies had hoped to include all Kosovo's factions in the negotiations, and U.S. chief verifier William Walker said he was "shocked" at the Serbs' refusal to negotiate with the rebels.

"I would say they are missing the point of what negotia-

tions are," Walker said by telephone in Pristina. "We had such pronouncements earlier, but things would usually change."

U.S. special envoy Christopher Hill demanded in Paris that all Kosovo Albanians slated to participate be allowed to depart for France.

Officials of the six-nation Balkan Contact Group, who had been working to get the KLA members to Paris, pressured government officials into the evening to drop their resistance, but with no visible results.

Meanwhile, hoping to keep the pressure on Western powers announced further preparations for a peacekeeping force. British Defence Secretary George Robertson announced he was putting several military units and 8,000 troops on standby for deployment in Kosovo.

The Serb defiance Friday came only a day after the Serbs grudgingly had accepted participation in the talks in Rambouillet, where world

powers demand they reach a political settlement with Albanian separatists to end 11 months of war.

Deepening the skepticism surrounding the talks, ethnic Albanian officials criticised the Serbs' selection Friday of a mixture of top allies to President Slobodan Milosevic and little-known ethnic leaders as negotiators.

Rexhep Qosja, a Kosovo Albanian politician and negotiator, complained that the Serb delegation is too low in rank to make any hard decisions. "It is not an echelon that can make decisions," he said.

Most of the Kosovo Albanian team had planned to fly to France early Friday afternoon in a C-130 jet sent by the French government, although three of five KLA negotiators had already left via other means.

But the two other KLA members reportedly stayed away from the airport, awaiting assurance they could board the plane without being arrested. The political representatives on the Albanian

team returned to the provincial capital when the impasse was not resolved.

"We are not going to leave Pristina if we are not completely," said negotiator Veton Surroi.

An official for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which runs the Kosovo monitoring mission, delivered a blunt message: "The Serbs will be held accountable if the Ramouillet talks do not go forward," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Four notable Milosevic allies besides Markovic were among those named as Serb negotiators: Yugoslav Deputy Premier Nikola Sainovic, Vladan Kutlesic, Vladimir Stambuk and Vojislav Zivkovic.

But the eight others were obscure representatives from mostly tiny ethnic communities in Albanian-majority Kosovo.

The composition of the Serb government team indicates that Serbia will insist on its

stand that ethnic Albanians, although they form 90 percent of Kosovo's population, should have no greater rights in the province than other, much less populous groups.

Serbian Information Minister Milan Kammenic told German television that Serbia would accept autonomy — "even a substantial one" — for Kosovo and warned that if the talks failed, "war would then be unavoidable."

Reiterating their own uncompromising stance, the rebels issued a statement late Friday saying they were talking to France their demands for "liberty, independence and democracy for Kosovo."

They also insisted that they, not Albanian political faction representatives, should lead the Kosovo Albanian population.

More than 2,000 people have been killed in Kosovo since last February. In the latest violence, a bomb exploded Friday night in a Serb-run cafe in Pristina. No injuries were reported.

U.S. weighs sanctions against Russia over proposed arms sales to Syria

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States may withhold some \$50 million in aid to Russia if Moscow proceeds with weapons sales to Syria, the State Department said Friday.

The sanctions would be imposed under U.S. law that requires that certain assistance be withheld from any foreign government that supplies lethal military equipment to a country identified as a state sponsor of terrorism, such as Syria, a department official said.

"Approximately \$50 million of assistance to the

Russian Federation could be at stake under the relevant statutory provisions," the official said.

It was not immediately clear what type of assistance could be withheld.

The official said Washington's concerns about Moscow's proposed arms sales were raised with Russian leaders during Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's recent trip there.

Russia's first deputy Prime Minister Yuri Maslyukov has vehemently criticised the threat of U.S.

sanctions.

The ITAR-TASS news agency quoted him as saying that Moscow "would react accordingly to this sort of threat."

On Thursday, a Russian newspaper reported that a Syrian military delegation was in Moscow negotiating a five-year, two-billion-dollar arms deal.

Syria is seeking to modernise its army, 90 per cent of whose hardware is currently Russian or Soviet, requiring up to one million dollars a year in Russian spare parts.

Iran rules out international inquiry into dissidents' murders

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran rejected Friday calls by the European parliament and other organisations for an international inquiry into a recent wave of murders of dissident intellectuals here.

"The entry of any foreign mission for an inquiry into murders or any other judicial matter is prohibited," conservative judiciary chief Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi said.

"Iran is an independent country and does not accept any foreign interference... The judiciary rejects an inquiry team or fact-finding mission of any sort," he told worshippers

at Iran's main weekly Muslim prayers at Tehran University.

Yazdi insisted that the openness of the Iranian justice system meant that there was in any case no need for any inquiry.

"There is a genuine dialogue between the judiciary and the people and we have no problem," he said.

But the wave of murders has led to a bitter war of words within the Islamic regime since the shock announcement by Iran's intelligence ministry early last month that "rogue" agents had been involved in the killings.

Opponents of reformist President Mohammad Khatami insist that the murders are part of a foreign plot to weaken institutions within the regime still dominated by the conservatives.

But reformers close to Khatami say that the murders

close to the conservatives and have demanded a thorough overhaul of Iran's intelligence services and their conservative head, Intelligence Minister Hojatoleslam Ghorbanali Dorri-Najafabadi.

But the wave of murders has led to a bitter war of words within the Islamic regime since the shock announcement by Iran's intelligence ministry early last month that "rogue" agents had been involved in the killings.

Critics say Turkey could ease its problems by accepting a decentralisation of power. It lacks, however, the strong government necessary for any such initiative.

Turkey is really affecting Turkey, not Iraq. Turkey's total losses are about \$30 billion," the source said.

Retired ambassador Suluk Elekdag wrote in Milliyet newspaper that the longer Saddam remained in power, the greater the danger Iraq would be divided. "Thus it is increasingly important for Turkey that Saddam be eliminated."

The United States is using planes deployed at Incirlik under Operation Northern Watch beyond their mandate," he wrote.

"Ecevit's government, although uneasy about this situation, does not stop the flights. It would be pointless to behave otherwise for Turkey, which so needs United States support."

Cyprus says missiles on Crete will be operational

By Ralph Boulton
Reuters

ANKARA — Turkey is increasingly anxious about U.S. air strikes against northern Iraq from its Incirlik base, fearing a creeping U.S. policy that could end in chaos in Baghdad or the nightmare of a Kurdish state on Turkish borders.

U.S. jets flying from the joint Turkish-U.S. base attacked seven Iraqi air defence sites in northern Iraq last weekend.

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, a critic of the Western-imposed Iraqi no-fly zones while in opposition, has yet to explicitly challenge U.S. insistence recent strikes were purely defensive. But a note of scepticism about U.S. policy has been clearly audible here since the veteran leftist-cum-nationalist took office last month.

The missiles were re-routed amid Greek and Cypriot fears that their installation on Cyprus would increase tensions with Turkey and wreck the island's bid to join the European Union.

"The decision of Greece and Cyprus stands that these missiles will be installed in Crete and will be fully deployed," government spokesman Christos Stylianides said.

It was not immediately clear whether Greece or Cyprus would control the S-300 missiles.

sent you with a fait accompli," Seyfi Tashan, head of the independent Foreign Policy Institute, said.

The fait accompli haunting Turkey above all would be division of Iraq and creation under Western sponsorship of a Kurdish state or protectorate above the 36th Parallel.

"This is certainly the fear that is in the back of Mr. Ecevit's mind," one government source said.

The area has been beyond Baghdad's control since the 1991 Gulf War and is patrolled by U.S. and British warplanes under Operation Northern Watch.

Washington has forged agreement between rival Iraqi Kurdish groups the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, who now control northern Iraq.

U.S. assurances this is not the first step to a Kurdish state have done little to calm fears here, especially among nationalists who are quick to revive memories of a Western plan in the 1920s to create a Kurdish state at Turkish expense.

The creation of such a state

could pose acute problems for a country which has been fighting Kurdish separatist guerrillas for the last 14 years, at a cost of 29,000 lives.

Inevitably, claims would be raised for inclusion of mainly Kurdish-populated areas of southeastern Turkey where Abdullah Ocalan's Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) has focused its campaign.

At least it might encourage PKK action.

"This would have serious negative implications for the Turkish policy of a unitary state," Tashan said.

"This is a chapter that Turkey does not want to open."

Turkey's government, although uneasy about this situation, does not stop the flights. It would be pointless to behave otherwise for Turkey, which so needs United States support."

edition of this," he said.

Government sources say Turkey, though heavily backed by the United States in its diplomacy, most recently in unsuccessful efforts to win Ocalan's extradition from Italy, feels its losses from international sanctions against Iraq imposed after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait are given scant attention.

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The list of those, as seen from Ankara, is long.

Among them are Syria, which had harboured Ocalan until a campaign of Turkish military forces forced him to flee last autumn; Greece, seen by the armed forces as the chief threat and the focus of territorial disputes; and Russia which remains a close rival in the transcaucasian and Central Asian regions.

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Four Danish sailors die in accident

HAMBURG (AP) — High waves and winds of up to 160 kilometres an hour sank a Danish coastal ship in the North Sea on Friday, killing at least four seamen. The bodies were recovered and two others from the ship Petit Folmer were still being sought near the wreck west of Sylt island. One of the five-man crew was rescued by helicopter. Rescue boats were also searching for a seaman reported overboard by a fishing ship off the northern coastline, a rescue office statement said. The water level in Hamburg harbour was 5.7 metres above normal but was forecast to slowly recede over the weekend.

U.S. Navy, merchant ships collide

VIRGINIA BEACH (AP) — A U.S. Navy destroyer and a Saudi merchant ship collided early Friday in the Atlantic Ocean, about 40 kilometres off the eastern city of Virginia Beach. No one went overboard, and the only injury was a broken arm suffered by a sailor aboard the USS Arthur W. Radford. The 172-metre-long Radford was conducting routine operations when it and the 200-metre container ship Saudi Riyadh collided. The Saudi Riyadh, from Saudi Arabia, was heading to Baltimore. Bows on both ships were damaged, but damage assessments remained incomplete, said Lt. Cmdr. Bill Spann, spokesman for the Navy's Second Fleet. The Norfolk-based Radford, commissioned in 1977, was headed to the Norfolk Naval Base, where divers will inspect the hull for damage.

Extradition proceedings against alleged Lut

King Hussein

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